Leading the Strategic Planning Process

The Premier Club Services Guide to Club Strategy

Edward A. Merritt, Ph.D.
My best wishes as your undertake this tremendously important initiative at your club.

- Ed Merritt
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Note:
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About the Author

Edward A. Merritt, Ph.D., is a professor of management at California State University (Cal Poly Pomona) where he also serves as chair of graduate studies and editor-in-chief of the Collins School's Management Journal. Prior to entering academe, he spent 25 years in the hospitality industry, where his primary focus was resort club development and management.

Dr. Merritt has held senior management positions in a well-rounded variety of hospitality settings. As vice president and general manager of Coto de Caza Golf and Racquet Club, the largest gated community in Southern California, he oversaw the planning, development and management of the 36-hole residential resort club development from start-up to maturity. As vice president and general manager of Sawgrass Country Club, he managed an equity conversion and transition of the world-famous destination resort from developer-owned to member-owned. As vice president and managing director of Ponte Vedra Inn and Club, he directed operations for an oceanfront resort hotel, spa and club community of more than 4,000 member families. As president of Merritt and Goodloe Hospitality, Inc., he founded and managed operations for the firm’s locations, served as principal real estate broker and provided integrated “turn-key” services to client hospitality companies opening in Florida.

Dr. Merritt has served as a faculty member for CMAA’s executive education programs at Cal Poly Pomona and Cornell University, authored CMAA’s first online distance education Business Management Institute, and also teaches in the Certification Review Course. Additionally, he has taught management at the University of California, Irvine, Pepperdine University and Cornell University. He has presented at a number of industry conferences, including the CMAA World Conference, the American Hospitality and Lodging Association (AH&LA) International Convention and Exposition and the FH&MA Hotel Show and Convention.

Dr. Merritt completed doctoral studies in management at Cornell University (Ph.D.), a master of business administration (MBA) at Pepperdine University and undergraduate studies (BS) at the University of Alabama. He is past president and a Paul Harris Fellow of Rotary, has served multiple terms as a Chamber of Commerce board member, is a past board member of the Southern Innkeepers Association, a founding council member of the Tourist Development Board, a member of CMAA, the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education (CHRIE) and commissioner of the 12-member board of the Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA), which oversees college program accreditation.

Dr. Merritt is the author of Leading Clubs Effectively: An Anthology of Current Thinking in Organizational Behavior as Applied to Hospitality Management (May 2003) and Leading Teams: How Club Managers Respond to Operations Scenarios (July 2004), as well as a number of academic journal and industry publication articles. His research and consulting interests include leadership and strategic planning in organizations located throughout the United States.
**Introduction and Overview**

**Welcome to Leading the Strategic Planning Process!**

The idea for this resource was conceived by the Premier Club Services (PCS) Department of the Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) to provide a definitive guide to the strategic planning process in private clubs. Specifically, it was written in response to managers’ requests for a user-friendly manual that would explain the planning process as it relates to private clubs – including step-by-step guidelines, background information, helpful hints, sample forms and real-life examples.

In order to help ensure effective outcomes, the strategic planning process should be followed and incorporated into a dynamic club-wide initiative. This book is just the resource for creating an integrated plan to serve members and paid staff.

Members include any volunteer involvement and governance – including the overlapping constituencies of officers, board members and committees – and the various classifications of members across their areas of interest. Paid staff includes management and club employees – regardless of rank – and includes the overlapping constituencies of managers, assistant managers, department heads, sports professionals, supervisors, shift leaders and hourly employees – essentially anyone who is paid by the club.

Simply stated, the overarching goal of club strategic planning is to help ensure that the members have established a vision and mission and that the paid staff is achieving that vision and mission through the process of goals and objectives. By creating an integrated process, managers can make smart, informed decisions, which help foster effective solutions for the members – and service excellence.

If we think of strategic planning as a process that helps ensure managerial effectiveness, then there are two logical procedures involved: operational planning and evaluation.

A strategic plan is broad-based and conceptual in nature, and it requires long-range, visionary thinking. Once achieved, a successful strategic plan leads to operations planning, which is more short-term and practical in nature (goals and objectives) and involves the general manager and chief operating officer (GM/COO) and the management team, supervisors and appropriate line staff.

Operations cannot be successful without an evaluation process, which enables the club’s leadership to modify goals, revise strategies and initiate new actions.

Strategic planning in clubs offers several benefits for a private club:

1. Strategic planning offers the club a way to examine where it is presently (if it is an existing club) or where it should be when it opens (if it is a new club). By understanding where the club is presently in terms of operations and performance (the actual) and comparing it to where the club has identified that it should be (the benchmark), a manager and board have created an opportunity for a gap analysis, which identifies what the club needs to do in order to achieve its goals.

   The “needs-to-do” becomes the basis for an action plan.

2. Strategic planning allows the club to define its future direction. Often referred to as simply “pro-active management,” defining future direction helps management get “in front of the power curve” in terms of running the club, instead of responding to *ad hoc* directional whims.

   Successful managers learn early that “whim management” is a dangerous game when trying to deliver a consistent product and to treat all members as important.

3. A strategic plan, as a written document, provides a consensus direction, which can be measured and evaluated.
However, strategic planning in clubs offers one major challenge. Most clubs that undertake strategic planning are existing clubs. Thus, the strategic plan is formulated in the midst of operations and, in many cases, must be “phased-in” to allow for little disruption in operations – it is not a “clean” process. The second element of this challenge is that strategy binds future boards, an element that may be viewed as a drawback by a board of governors.

However, binding future boards of governors is, from an overall perspective, a great idea for members and management – it lends continuity to a potentially disparate series of governors. Most clubs elect new presidents each year and new board members in thirds – one-third of the board changes each year – a dynamic that makes strategic planning an even more important element for success.

Who Should Use This Book

General managers, as the chief operating officers of their clubs (GM/COOs), are the specific audience for this book. GM/COOs would typically lead the strategic planning process from an administrative perspective on behalf of the members and the paid staff. However, it is important to note that the GM/COO should be a significant contributor to the overall strategic planning process. Because of the GM/COO’s involvement in the day-to-day club operation of the club, he/she is in a unique position to bring a significant breadth of knowledge to the strategic planning process that will prove to be invaluable.

Clubs will vary widely in their approach to strategy. Shaped by tradition, size and focus, clubs will adopt different preferences and methodologies. This book accommodates those wants and needs by recognizing the functional reality that clubs want to have choices in how they approach strategy – going-it-alone, doing some of the work themselves or using a consultant.

For example, a club that would typically use consultants for strategic planning would use this book as an education and information tool in effectively guiding the process. Another club may decide to develop some hybrid form of the process, using a consultant for certain aspects of strategy and going-it-alone in other areas. In such a case, this book can help coordinate the process.

Other clubs that may want to do strategic planning entirely in-house can – and should – use this book as a stand-alone resource for developing an integrated process.

Strategic Planning as a Process

In understanding strategic planning as a process that filters throughout the organization, it is helpful to think of a typical club – whether country club, city club, golf club, tennis club, yacht club or any other kind of club – as a single-business company. As such, it has its own hierarchy with respect to the way that the strategic plan courses through its organizational veins.

The illustration provided on page 4 as a guideline represents this flow of the plan from narrow to broad.
Illustration: The Club Strategic Planning Pyramid

**Club Strategic Planning**
Responsibility of board of governors and GM/COO

**Functional Strategic Planning**
Responsibility of functional department heads (i.e., marketing, finance, IT, HR)

**Operational Strategic Planning**
Responsibility of operational department heads (i.e., F&B, sports professionals)
Club Strategic Planning: The board of governors and the GM/COO usually take the lead in creating the club’s strategic plan. The primary strategic-planning issues include highest-level strategies and initiatives to maintain or enhance the club’s position as a successful organization serving its members over time. This book focuses on strategic planning at the club level.

Functional Strategic Planning: The functional department heads – typically represented by staff heading up non-operational, support entities at the club, such as marketing, finance, information technology and human resources – in conjunction with the GM/COO, usually take the lead in creating functional strategic plans. The primary planning issues include creating strategies and initiatives to support the overall club – club strategic planning and operations strategic planning – and to achieve departmental performance goals and objectives.

Operational Strategic Planning: The operational department heads – typically staff members heading up operations, such as food and beverage and the various sports (golf, tennis, swim, equestrian, etc.) – in conjunction with the GM/COO, usually take the lead in operational strategic planning. Primary planning issues include creating department-specific strategies aimed at supporting club and functional strategies and achieving departmental performance goals and objectives.

How This Book is Organized
This book has been crafted on the assumption that no formal strategic initiative exists at your club.

Thus, Leading the Strategic Planning Process is organized chronologically: GM/COOs can follow along, step-by-step, in order to create an organized and integrated plan.

Realistically, however, the overwhelming majority of clubs will have some elements of strategy in place and may need to institute others. In these cases, GM/COOs can refer to the book more holistically to establish the relationship between and general order of the strategic planning elements. And while the individual elements work best in the order and manner specified, they can also serve supplemental functions alongside a given club’s current practices.

Organized as both guidebook and template, this resource works as well for existing clubs seeking to improve or adapt a strategic plan as it does for new clubs attempting to create an entirely new plan.

As such, detailed background information and club-specific examples are included to help clubs complete planning tasks and create basic forms and documents, which can be edited to deal with a club’s particular sensitivities.

This book includes three major divisions:
- Organizational Strategic Planning;
- Personal Strategic Planning; and,
- Forms, Examples and Templates.

Organizational Strategic Planning
Organizational strategy includes the following four sections, each addressing essential planning components:

1. Strategic Planning Steps: Vision, mission, goals and objectives are the fundamental building blocks of any club organization. Once these have been established, a club should conduct a situation analysis in preparation for creating the strategy statement – the proclamation of the club’s plan – to guide budgets, an action plan for implementation and a methodology for controlling and monitoring a club’s progress.

2. Conducting a Service Analysis: Much is spoken about the importance of excellent service in clubs; however, not much is done to analyze – both qualitatively and quantitatively – the service effort: What do the service providers actually do “on-the-job”? And what infrastructure is in place to facilitate excellent member service?

3. Conducting a Strategic and Long-Range Planning Survey: Developing and administering a meaningful survey – and replicating it over time – is a tremendously valuable tool. A club can – and should – collect data on member preferences, opinions and demographics and can measure operational improvement over time. One of the essential features inherent in this survey – and in any quality survey questionnaire – is its objectivity. It is unbiased and has no ulterior motive. There is no peripheral intent to sell proprietary products or services.
4. Strategic Implementation Analysis. As a manager, you will want to ensure that each of the 11 elements of implementation (see section 1.4 for a detailed list and explanation) are considered as you and your club set about the process of making it all happen.

Personal Strategic Planning
The concept behind “personal strategic planning” suggests that managers cannot do the best possible job for their clubs unless they know who they are and where they are headed – know thyself. This section serves as a guide for conducting a personal strategic analysis according to five major elements that assist managers in learning more about themselves:

1. Rank Ordered Descriptors: Managers should first describe themselves specifically in order to gain insight about who they are generally – their personality and values.

2. Primary Strengths: What are you, as a GM/COO, good at doing? This section helps you list these qualities systematically.

3. Individuals and Experiences: Most people have been molded and shaped, to a large extent, by particular individuals and events – and managers are no exception. In fact, it is perhaps more important for GM/COOs to identify and reflect on these influential people and experiences – to understand who they are and how they got there – in order to manage their staff more effectively.

4. Personal and Professional Goals and Objectives: Managers report that setting goals and objectives is an excellent way to develop a roadmap for where they are going and where their energies should be focused. This fourth section provides a checklist for setting five- and 10-year goals in personal and professional endeavors.

5. Planning for Your Next Logical Steps: What is your vision of the future? An important element in preparing for the future is forecasting your next logical career steps so that you can begin moving your efforts in that direction. To the extent that you can influence outcomes, you want to help create your future instead of simply allowing circumstances to dictate it for you.

Appendix: Forms, Examples, and Templates
These basic forms and documents are pre-engineered, complete and industry-tested. They have been used successfully at start-up and existing clubs for years – by GM/COOs and consultants alike – and can be easily adapted according to your club’s needs and sensitivities.
1 Organizational Strategic Planning

Organizational strategic planning helps you lead your club with a long-term perspective. For a club, strategic planning always relates to the club’s self-definition of what it wants to become. Thus, strategic planning affects operational decisions and determines how the club will practically achieve what it ideally wants to be.

1.1 Strategic Planning Steps

Undertaking the process of strategic planning can be a daunting task.

There are a number of elements inherent in the creation of an integrated strategic plan that may, at first glance, confuse even the most experienced club manager. However, when considered in a progressive order of importance, these elements work clearly and crucially with each other.

These elements are listed and discussed in order. If any one step is not already in place at the club, the manager responsible for the strategic planning process should ensure that the missing step is completed before proceeding to the next stage of the process.

Think of the strategic planning process as a funnel: From the top, vision (the broadest of the elements) flows downward toward the tip of the funnel and through an array of increasingly focused and more specific elements – mission, goals and objectives – leading to situational analysis, a strategy statement, budgets, an action plan for achievement and objective controls for measurement.

From the outset of the planning process, be sure to create an atmosphere in which contributions are welcomed. Essentially, you want to help ensure that all participants can safely share ideas, without the ideas being “shouted down” as insignificant or otherwise unimportant.

To help you set the appropriate tone:

1. Encourage active involvement. All participants (in any meeting or planning session) should be actively involved in the process. Stating participation expectations up front can help keep impatient or more vocal participants from controlling the process – and potentially shutting down creative viewpoints and ideas.

2. Solicit different points of view. The idea during these sessions – especially in the early stages – is to get broadness of ideas. You may find it helpful to announce that the purpose is to generate many ideas (quantity) and that judgment about the relevance of ideas (quality) will come later.

3. Probe issues. You – or perhaps the club president – should probe issues during the meetings by posing questions to the group. This probing provides encouragement to “flesh–out” and elaborate on ideas, which provides additional richness to the process.

4. Manage conflict. Conflict needs to be mediated. Conflict of ideas and viewpoints is natural and should be encouraged to a point, as healthy disagreement brings additional ideas to bear that would not otherwise be addressed. However, if personal attacks ensue or if negativity develops between certain interest groups, a respected and influential person may need to refocus the group’s energy. Because many clubs’ policies prohibit paid staff from interceding in member disputes (the paid staff manages the paid staff; members manage members), that person is usually a member who has agreed in advance to serve as mediator.

But before any planning meeting begins, consider what outcome you seek.

Whether you (the GM/COO), the club president or another board member leads the meeting, you, he or she should announce that objective in advance – whether the club is looking for agreement or simply for insight and background. Announcing the purpose of the meeting offers participants indications as to the expected nature of their comments, viewpoints or answers.

Assuming that the meeting seeks agreement in the form of a decision, the person leading the meeting (the leader) should always consider how the decision will be made.
We often think that, in clubs, decisions are made simply by a majority. But that is not usually the case. Instead, decisions are made in private clubs in one of the following manners:

1. Authority. In decision by authority, the leader typically accepts input but reserves ultimate decision-making authority; thus, meeting participants are advisory. If this is the case, participants should be made aware of their advisory status so that they know what to expect of the decision-making process.

2. Majority. When deciding by majority, the leader typically accepts input – and offers his or her own – before calling for a vote (Robert’s Rules of Order dictate a slightly different process with essentially the same outcome). The decision gains approval either by simple majority or, in some cases, by super majority (two-thirds majority). Thus, meeting participants are advisors and voters.

3. Minority. Decision by minority suggests that the leader allows a vocal or passionate minority to mold the decision. In clubs, this method is often technically decision by authority, though the authoritarian allows the vocal minority to influence the outcome – to the point that the minority view is adopted. While it may not seem to be used often, we see this in clubs regularly. A group that is unified, vocal and passionate – no matter how small – can be very influential.

4. Unanimity. The perceived strength of a unanimous decision lies in the fact that all eligible voters voted on a decision – whether for or against – with no abstentions. Unanimity is a form of decision by majority, unique because the “100-percent” vote often further legitimizes the decision.

5. Consensus. Decision by consensus is, by far, the “bread-and-butter” decision-making model most used in the private club environment. Consensus, like majority, is technically decision by authority; in consensus, though, the authoritarian allows participants to arrive at a decision informally and usually without a vote. The leader compromises throughout discussion to help ensure inclusion before asking for consensus among members – typically indicated by a simple nod of agreement or non-response. The decision is then adopted.

Once your discussion and planning meetings are appropriately focused – participants are enthusiastic and understand how decisions will be made – your strategic planning process can begin by outlining your club’s vision.

1.1.1 Vision
Vision is perhaps the most fundamental of the elements in strategic planning.

Vision is future-oriented and identifies what the club is all about – its purpose for being as well as where the club is heading. Infusing the club with a definite sense of purpose, vision states a direction and describes the destination.

At the outset of “visioneering,” which usually begins at the board level, it is important to assess others’ concept of vision. However, it is often difficult for board members to find a common language to describe their respective visions of the club.

One effective way to bring about an understanding of vision is to make a comparison between the club and an idea or object unrelated to the club. In making such a comparison – constructing a metaphor to describe the club – it is helpful to select a product with widespread familiarity and a high degree of stratification. The automobile industry is a great place to start, for example.

It may sound silly at first, but getting fundamental agreement on what a club is presently and what the club should be creates the opportunity for a “gap analysis” – for which an automobile-related metaphor is an effective tool.

For example, as you begin the strategic planning process with your board, you might ask this question during a meeting:

*If this club were a car, what kind of car should it be?*
This question works equally well for existing clubs (those that have some strategic planning elements in place) or new clubs that are seeking to define a course for the club. The question is straight-forward, understandable and, perhaps most importantly, prompts the “visioneering” process.

While this process is valuable, do not expect it to be quick or easy. Vision, as the backbone of the club, is often difficult – quite difficult – to identify with consensus among the various constituencies within the club. This is especially true for older clubs, those with currently weak or irrelevant vision statements and those offering a wider variety of membership types.

Remember, vision develops the basic concept of the club, projects where the club needs to be headed and infuses the club with a sense of purpose.

Thus, the question must be asked in terms of ideals.

These discussions often go on for some time as participants share the definition of their club in ideal terms. Be careful not to rush such discussion. It is the most foundational discussion in the entire process because it sets the club direction.

And expect to get a variety of answers, though there may be less variation among answers from board members alone. Typically, “Mercedes Benz,” “BMW” and “Jaguar” top the list of responses. If that is your experience, your club is in great shape and your strategic planning process likely needs little refinement.

However, it is more likely that you will hear a wider range of answers. In older clubs with multiple membership types and weaker past visions, answers may include “Rolls-Royce,” “Toyota” and “Chevrolet.” Clearly, there is much work to be done before consensus can be reached and before you can define what the club should be, ideally.

A logical follow-up question establishes the current state of the club and highlights the disparity of members’ views and responses:

If we use a car as an example, what kind of car is the club presently?

This question is similar to the first, but forces the participants to assess the club’s actual and current status – what the club is – rather than an intended ideal. Again, plan for an extended discussion as participants voice their opinions about how the club meets expectations and where it may fall short – all in the context of the club as an automobile.

And as before, expect to get a variety of answers. In addition to the answers listed above, answers such as “Volkswagen,” “Edsel,” “Ferrari” and “Bentley” are not uncommon.

While it may seem like we have opened a huge “can of worms,” the data will be rich with possibilities. Celebrate the fact that you now have actual data!

To turn the data into useful and practical information, comparison between the ideal and actual descriptions of the club – a likely “gap” in responses, unless your members are already in agreement about all aspects of the club – is an effective “gap analysis” of where you are presently as a club and where you want to be ideally as a club.

The distance between present and ideal defines the “gap” and provides the basis for understanding how far the club is away from where it wants to be, ideally. This becomes fodder for an action plan to be instituted later.

As clubs work their way through this strategic planning process, it is especially important to make sure that your ideal perception of the club is realistic. Just because members want their club to be a Rolls Royce doesn’t mean that it should operate on that level. At the end of this section, there is an example of a Chevrolet-level club that operated like a Rolls Royce. Be sure to review that example to get a feel for how misidentifying the ideal model can present a serious problem.

After comparing answers and identifying the gap, you and your planners should compare the answers to each of the proposed questions – both the ideal (what kind of car should it be?) and the actual (what is it presently?). To do so,
record demographic statistics for your participants (as much as club traditions and member preferences allow) and look for similarities between answers, which may help you correlate those answers to areas of operations within the club.

For example, if most of your tennis-member respondents described the current state of the club in terms of “low-end” cars, then you might consider examining the tennis department and operation – its facilities, staff, programs and value. Again, the data from responses are meaningless unless converted into information, which lays the foundation for an action plan for implementing your strategic planning decisions.

For illustration, these examples are fairly clean and simple. In an actual discussion, however, more probing and detailed prompts in questioning will help develop more robustness in answers, yielding richer information for use in decision-making.

Asking the question “If we use a car as an example, what kind of car is the club presently?” in order to assess members’ actual perception of the club is adequate, but more specific and probing questions may include:

- What model?
- What is its condition?
- What is the quality of its stereo? its tires?
- What other “options” does this car have?

Depending on the willingness and enthusiasm of your group, you may need to plant less or more detail in order to get them talking. However, once you get them talking, ensure that responses are recorded, especially since the pace of discussion will likely pick up considerably.

For example, if members answer initial questions vaguely, probe for meaning: Mr. Gordon, you stated that the present club would be a Mercedes-Benz, S-class, with a faded paint job and broken dashboard controls. Will you please elaborate a bit to help ensure that I hear what you are saying? Are the controls missing? Or do they work occasionally? Why is the paint faded?

Naturally, these additional prompts will lead into more specific discussion about the club itself, as the framework of the car metaphor generates discussion about values and qualities that apply to the club. Through this initial stage of “visioneering,” the club and its members, particularly those participating in planning discussions, will develop a sense of the club’s concept – of where it needs to be headed – and will begin infusing the club with a sense of purpose.

Here is an example of the vision statement for a start-up club that used the automobile-as-metaphor process:

The Country Club of Tarantula Canyon will create an exciting, innovative, differentiated, private club experience that will redefine quality in Southern California. By creating a country club experience that is second to none, continuously innovating while recognizing tradition and broadening our appeal to the members and prospective members, we will be successful in our quest for excellence. Our success in these endeavors will create greater value for our members and greater desirability for prospective members.

This is one example of a successful club that envisions itself as a Rolls-Royce-level club. By aligning its infrastructure, service and facilities toward the “high-end,” the club has initiation fees at the upper end, expensive (and inclusive) dues and impeccable service. Members expect to pay a lot; however, they expect exceptional value, as well.

Think for a moment about this successful club. It knows what it is and who its members are. The message is clearly communicated – we are a Rolls-Royce-level club – in everything that the club staff and management think, say or do. It does not appeal to Chevrolet-level members and does not try to do so. Instead, it focuses its marketing toward skimming the “cream” from the highest income earners in Southern California — the Rodeo Drive bunch.

But do not misunderstand this concept. There is nothing wrong with a being a Chevrolet-type club, and there are a number of extremely successful Chevrolet clubs. But those clubs are successful because they understand clearly that they are Chevrolet-level clubs – that is what they are, that is how they market themselves, and that is how they want to be defined.
These clubs typically have average initiation fees and dues structures and have a full array of reasonably maintained facilities. They are dependable, but not flashy or lavish. Their strength lies in their ability to know clearly what they are as clubs.

Problems often develop when some among a given club’s population – whether staff, members, managers or otherwise – do not share this clear understanding of their club’s vision.

Think for a moment about the member who visits another club and notices a number of the “special” offerings and amenities that the host club offers, only to return to his or her home club and suggest that you, the GM/COO, immediately adopt similar offerings.

The request may be simple and easily achieved. But it may then lead to larger and more elaborate requests. Where does it stop?

That sort of “Pandora’s box” effect may be over-generalizing the situation. Still, without a clear understanding of what a club is about – its vision – club members do tend to push for Chevrolet clubs to slowly morph into Cadillac clubs – just different enough in service or operation to satisfy the various and typically random “requests.”

While club managers and boards usually face the realities of modest increases in dues each year, member desires often outpace dues increases in terms of expense. The cost of satisfying individual requests may then become, for your members, assumed fixed-expenses (i.e., if you drop the “add-on,” you do so at your peril and at the risk of losing members to other clubs providing those “add-ons”).

A clear understanding of what kind of club yours is helps prevent this from occurring – or at least from occurring without careful examination.

For example, one club we visited gave the impression of being a Chevrolet-level club. Modest by most standards, the club had, however, a few areas of discontinuity in operations. These inconsistencies helped explain the club’s dire financial straits.

All cars were valet-parked. Pouring liquors were typical, though the house scotch was Chivas Regal. Tablecloths were of an average quality, a standard polyester blend, but the china was Villeroy and Boch and the flatware was Reed and Barton. Luncheon steaks were Angus beef and the sandwich bread was custom-baked at a local bakery.

An interview with the general manager revealed that he had been “helpfully advised” by some of the membership over the years. He had been pressured by governors, influential committee chairs and powerful members to make changes based on their personal whims.

Frankly, the club would have been more accurately described as a “Frankenstein” club instead of a “Chevrolet” club.

Certain elements of the club were so out of line with its basic identity that the club had morphed into a monster – a bit of this, a bit of that. Indeed, the “top-shelf” Chivas Regal Scotch was priced at $2.00 for a two-ounce pour, including tax and gratuity, a cost dictated by a past club president who preferred the expensive brand to the former house scotch.

Yet after beginning the strategic planning process, including identifying a clear vision, the club has re-created itself. A visionary president and GM/COO took charge of the arduous process in order to make the club a healthy and happy Chevrolet-level club once again.

The pouring scotch at that club is now the more appropriate Grants. Who would have thought that the “second-shelf” Grants could be smoother than Chivas Regal? At this club, it clearly is – it fits in with the club’s image and perception more effectively and appropriately.
Generic Business-Level Strategies
Ultimately, all this talk about cars is intended to bring us closer toward a deeper understanding of where your club is currently and where it should be going in terms of planning and operations.

Michael Porter of the Harvard Business School devised a method for examining strategic planning as a composite of four different leadership strategies:

- Low cost;
- Differentiation;
- Focused low cost; and
- Focused differentiation.

In the overall strategic planning process, clubs align everything they think, say and do toward one of these generic strategies.

How can we relate these strategies to private clubs and apply them to operational decisions? As with discussion and planning stages, comparing these business-level strategies is easily facilitated with car-related imagery.

These strategies are best presented without value judgments. To ask which is most desirable would be like asking “which company would you rather run, Tiffany’s or Wal-Mart?”

The obvious answer for you (and, thus, for your club): It depends—both on your needs, desires and goals.

Low-cost: The focus of low-cost leadership is high sales at low cost, achieved by appeal to a broad target market. Typically, new clubs offering a “no-frills” approach would adopt this sort of strategy, which allows them to be competitive by undercutting other clubs in member costs – initiation fees, dues and other expenses. Theoretically, a larger pool of potential members would join or be able to join the club because of those low costs. Henry Ford’s Model T epitomized this strategy: cheap, simple, reliable, black paint – a practical and cost-effective option.

Differentiation: With differentiation, the strategic focus is on uniqueness and price. Real estate developers might adopt this strategy, entering a market at several economic levels with a variety of club communities. They would create clubs of different types at a range of price points – from low to high – thereby capturing a large number of total sales. This strategy could be compared to that of General Motors. GM offers Chevrolet, Pontiac, Buick, Cadillac, Saturn, Saab and Hummer; essentially, they offer something for every car-buyer – from entry level to high end.

Focused low-cost: Focused low-cost leadership emphasizes high sales at low cost to a narrow target market. Clubs offering a “no-frills” approach in a particular area – such as tennis – use this strategy. Undercutting other tennis clubs in initiation fees, dues and other charges allows this type of club to attract a larger pool of potential tennis members. The mid-1980s Hyundai utilized this strategy – large volume to a narrow market. With a focused low-cost strategy, clubs understand that they are not for everybody – members have access to great tennis services and facilities, but little else – but offer a great value to tennis enthusiasts.

Focused differentiation: Focused differentiation emphasizes uniqueness and price, but for a narrow market. For example, “high-end,” independent, member-owned clubs offer a single membership plan at a high price, marketing themselves as “elite” – and thereby appealing to a narrow affluent audience. Their intangible array of desirable relationships and excellent facilities helps them capture a low number of total sales, but at high price. Rolls-Royce and Ferrari market in this manner.

While the focused differentiation model is often stereotypically assumed to be the business model of all private clubs, any of these generic business-level strategies can work quite well. Remember, though, the desirability of each strategy depends on the goals of each particular club.
During “visioneering,” it is essential to clarify the club’s generic strategy. But do not allow your club to get stuck in the middle. Often competing forces within the membership demand both high quality and low price – the conversation may proceed like this:

Look, I know that the regular price for a banquet is $39.00. However, this is a great function for a great cause. We need for you to do it for $30.00, including tax and gratuity, and it has to be the best event of the year because the senator will be attending.

Or: Okay, here’s the plan, we really need to get a ton of new members in here. So, what we will do is give the next 50 members who join at the regular initiation fee free dues for 10 years.

To begin a “fire sale” on Rolls-Royces will cheapen the product and upset existing owners! But thinking strategically – and consistently and clearly – helps create a successful future.

Porter’s Generic Business-Level Strategy could be illustrated in this manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitive advantage source</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Unique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breadth of competitive scope</td>
<td>Broad target market</td>
<td>Low-cost (quantity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrow target market</td>
<td>Focused low-cost (quantity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secrets in Creating a Strategic Vision
If your club does not have a clear vision, make the process of creating a strategic vision more manageable by considering the following guidelines.

Flexibility and Inclusion
A number of clubs that go about the business of creating a vision do so with one person, such as the club president, acting as the visionary. This is helpful, but only partly effective.

The club president, ideally, is a visionary who will help spearhead the strategic planning and visioneering process. And the club GM/COO should act as an internal facilitator of this process – ensuring effective communication with and inclusion of all constituencies within the club.

Yet there are usually at least three issues that keep this from being the normal process.

First, many of the clubs that create a written vision do so in the midst of operations – the vision is created after the club is established and operating. Under ideal circumstances, vision is created before the club is created and updated.
Second, even clubs that created a vision before opening may “lose their way” over the years. What may have been the purpose of the club when it opened many years before may have changed significantly. For those clubs, a clear vision attuned to both the present and the future must be created.

Third, the established norms of club governance do not typically provide an encouraging atmosphere for dealing with the club’s most basic tenets.

Consider for a moment the typical club structure: A president holds office for one to two years, leading a board of governors, one-third of whose members join and leave the board each year.

Because of this dynamic, presidents who want to be successful creating or significantly updating the club vision should do so in a spirit of inclusion and flexibility. Creating this spirit is a time-consuming process not easily facilitated by the governance structure of most clubs (as explained above). However, it is perhaps the single most important agreement the stakeholders can make, as it guides everything that the club – its staff, management and members – thinks, says and does.

All stakeholders should have an opportunity to help mold and shape a vision for the club. One successful model for this process is that the president champions the issue and works in concert with the club’s GM/COO, who ensures follow-through on the details of the process.

The expedient method, and the one often observed at clubs, has a strong, visionary club president step forward to tackle this process with a pre-determined outcome. While the job gets accomplished, the product – the true vision – becomes compromised due to lack of flexibility and inclusion in the process.

Perfectionism Hurts

Clubs are not well served by attempts to create the “perfect” vision; the perfect vision does not exist. Instead, clubs are better off infusing the paid staff and their members with a definite sense of purpose.

One world-famous resort club located along coastal Florida, for example, began with a “unique,” not necessarily “perfect,” visionary element. Built by an owner-developer, who was also an avid outdoorsman, the club was located in an area rife with dressy, stuffy, “old-line” and “blue-blooded” formal clubs. He envisioned a club that would do things differently – a club that would be first-class without acting first-class.

He described this vision simply: “barefoot elegance.” Resort guests, prospective and current members and staff all understood his vision. This club became a casual and laid-back destination-island club resort known for exceptional service and “high-end” amenities.

Your club’s vision likely cannot – and perhaps should not – be fully expressed in such simple terms. If it is, it should not be expressed in that manner alone. The resort club president had the foresight to paint a picture of the club’s purpose without “word-smithing” the analysis into paralyzing detail. Still, “barefoot elegance” became the backbone and reference point for everything that the club would think, say and do over the years.

Challenge What Holds the Club Back

The visioneering process is more concerned with ideals than with present states in elucidating the club’s purpose.

Thus, during this process, it is likely that certain constraints will be seen as impediments to progress. Someone might suggest, “Yes, that is a great idea, but we cannot possibly be that.”

Challenges, whether brought about by outside forces, such as governmental influence or competition, or internal forces, such as physical limitations or operational difficulties, should be realistically addressed during the vision process.

There is no doubt that challenges to your club’s ideal vision will develop. However, those challenges should be viewed realistically and not simply as inconveniences.
One club in inland southern California was trying to establish its vision – its reason for being. The club organizers wanted everyone associated with the club to understand this vision. As the story goes, the original vision grew from the interests of one young, dependent member who had the potential to become a world-class-caliber swimmer.

Among the major problems he faced in fulfilling this potential was the lack of an infrastructure for coaching and training – seemingly insurmountable drawbacks, both for his interests as a young swimmer and for the club itself.

However, vision drove the club – in everything that it would think, say and do for the next 25 years – to become a powerhouse swimming club with one of the top programs in the nation. In hindsight, it is clear that a specific vision nurtured a strong commitment. With that strong commitment, potential members flocked to the club so their kids could be a part of this new, unprecedented program.

Over the years, this club produced scores of world-class swimmers, including several Olympic medalists.

**Understand the Club**

Whether your club is located on the Florida coast or inland southern California, nobody understands your club better than your management, staff and members understand it.

That statement sounds obvious – and it is.

Scores of clubs pay thousands of dollars so that external consultants can tell them what to do in terms of strategic planning. While consultants can be very helpful and instructive in areas of leadership and strategic planning, they do not wear magic socks.

Instead, consultants provide the elements of the strategic planning process and have the additional experience of having seen and analyzed a wide variety of solutions to fairly common club issues. Their external expertise, however, cannot substitute for the club’s local and internal knowledge of its personality.

In the end, what works for any particular club is based on that particular club-wide personality. In the visioneering process, the success of the club depends on uniqueness and personality.

**Connect Vision with Operations**

For the vision to become reality, there should be a connection between vision and operation.

MBA students often speak of operations as “the burning platform.” Envision an on-going operation as an oil rig that has caught fire: Engineers and laborers are trained to expect catastrophe as part of daily operations and are so well-trained that the operation continues even in the midst of such catastrophe.

The idea is simple: A club’s vision should be so well-integrated into operations that, even under stressful conditions, everyone executes his or her duties in a manner consistent with that vision.

To help guide you toward the ultimate product of visioneering, ensure that your planning and discussions do the following:

1. **Define the business.** This may seem an obvious task, but it should not be underestimated. Such discussion is elemental, especially if the club has never established a definite and stated purpose and reason for being. A private club can be defined by answering three questions:
   a. Who are the club’s members?
   b. What are the members’ wants and needs?
   c. How will the club satisfy the members’ wants and needs?

2. **Decide the long-term strategy.** The long-term strategy should consider a timeframe reaching five to 10 years into the future.

3. **Communicate the vision.** The vision should be stated clearly and in a way that inspires members and staff alike. Communicating the vision in everything that a club thinks, says or does is perhaps as important as the creation of the vision itself – share the vision! Construct a concise, well-worded vision statement to empower
employees with a higher sense of purpose. For example, a painter in the engineering department who feels tied to the club’s vision might consider it his job to “maintain a treasured showplace” not to simply “paint white trim.”

1.1.2 Mission
Mission includes the broadest and highest level of club goals and objectives. A written mission statement includes not only the club’s vision and purpose, but also the basic services the club provides. Generally, the mission statement is one that, if realized, ensures the club’s success.

Before moving forward, it is important to highlight the distinction between the vision and mission campaigns. Vision is the broadest of the elements in the strategic planning process. Mission includes a summary of the vision and then adds important elements of the basic services provided at the club.

More than any other element in the strategic planning process, the mission statement elucidates the first-order reasons for the club’s existence – it flows directly from and crystallizes the vision.

The mission statement should be used everywhere to communicate and reinforce the vision and to remind the club community – members, staff, guests, vendors and any others – why the club exists and what basic services it provides.

To achieve this end, the mission statement should be reproduced and printed in all club publications – in the monthly newsletter, on club stationery and letterhead, in advertisements, in public relations articles, club employee handbooks, board orientation manuals, new-member materials and even on the membership application.

Essentially, if you print or copy an information piece or any information media, consider including the club’s mission statement as a companion element. Some clubs even print and laminate the mission statement on business cards that the paid staff carries when on duty as a reminder of the club’s basic tenets.

A sample mission statement for a start-up club might read as follows:

_The Country Club of Tarantula Canyon was created as a haven for its members. We are second to none in our purpose to offer an extraordinary array of club experiences, in our commitment to the highest level of member service and in our willingness to recognize our employees as the most valuable asset within the club. Our allegiance to these basic elements will ensure long-term success for our members and staff._

When creating a mission statement, carefully consider these three elements as a guideline:

1. Common features: What are the club’s products and services? What markets or potential members does the club pursue? What are the club’s core values? What are some of the club’s broadest goals? What is the club’s competitive position? What is the image that the club wants to portray to those outside the club?

2. Internal scans: What are the unique strengths that the club should be known for and build upon? What weaknesses should the club improve upon internally?

3. External scans: What demographic shifts should the club anticipate? What changes in products and services may come about over the next five years? What is the club’s source of labor? What laws and regulations could change the ways that the club does business? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the competition?

1.1.3 Goals
Goals focus on a future that a club strives to achieve. Goals ensure fulfillment of the mission – how well a club aims toward those goals dictates its effectiveness.

Strategic vision and direction transition to performance targets through goal-creation (Section 1.4.11.1). As objectives, goals are evidence of the commitment by management to achieve specific outcomes or particular results.
Managers who insist on achieving mutually agreed upon and focused goals and objectives are far more effective in reaching those goals than are managers who have only a vague idea of what they should be doing.

In operational terms, goals and objectives are the “meat and potatoes” of strategic planning and may have any one of three distinct, time-specific references:

1. **Short-term operational goal**: In general club terms, an operational goal that can be accomplished within approximately three months is a “short-term” goal – but is no less vital to the club's success. For example, a club membership department decides in January to eliminate errors in the membership roster before the end of February.

2. **Mid-term operational goal**: An operational goal that can be accomplished within eight months is a “mid-term” goal. For example, a club’s golf course maintenance department decides in January to rebuild the bunker drainage system before the end of June.

3. **Long-term operational goal**: A goal that can be reached in 12 months or more is a “long-term” goal. A club’s aquatic department may be re-building the swim team and, in late July, sets a goal of winning the club novice league championships held in August of the following summer.

Unlike operational goals, strategic goals have far more contextual timeframes. In other words, the timeframes that define strategic goals depend on the context of the goals themselves. The long-term nature of “strategic” planning dictates that strategic goals are inherently more time-intensive and are not as easily measured by discrete and specific deadlines.

1. **Short-term strategic goal**: A club membership department decides in January to admit a net total of 10 new members before the end of December.

2. **Mid-term strategic goal**: A club membership department decides in January 2005 to admit a net total of 30 new members before the end of December 2008.

3. **Long-term strategic goal**: A club membership department decides in January 2005 to admit a net total of 50 new members before the end of December 2010. When the club achieves the goal of 50 net new members, it will become a replacement club instead of a growth club.

In general terms, these are strategic goals, in the broadest sense, because they flow from an overall plan over years.

### 1.1.4 Objectives

Objectives are often described as the specific “whats” of a club. Objectives include short-term, departmental aspirations and aims. Objectives should be quantifiable – measurable by counting and timing – and should serve as steps toward goal-achievement.

As with goals, the distinction between operational and strategic objectives is a fine one. For example, one could argue that the short- and mid-term strategic goals used in the examples above are actually objectives – or interim goals – of the long-term goal to increase the net total membership by 50 members within five years.

But consider the context: If we are speaking specifically of the short-term strategic goal of a net gain of 10 new members, the objectives of that goal are the net monthly gains that comprise the 12-month goal. Assuming that we have alignment – that all operations departments support strategy – everything that the club thinks, says and does amounts to achievement of the highest-order long-term goals.

As you proceed through these initial planning stages, do not be overly concerned about distinguishing an objective from a goal. Instead, concern yourself with aligning everything that the club thinks, says and does toward the highest and broadest-order goals. The rest is word-games.
1.1.5 Organizational Situation Analysis (SWOT)
Situation analysis is a concept that has existed for many years and is rooted in Philip Selznick’s *Leadership in Administration* (1957).

Situation analysis helps a club establish a sense of status and direction – where it is currently and where it might go in the future. Such analysis helps evaluate a club’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

SWOT analysis is a valuable tool for planning the strategic direction of a club.

In *The Rise and Fall of Strategy Planning* (1994), Henry Mintzberg explained the SWOT model as a “Design School” model composed of separate elements that feed into an integrated analysis.

The strategic plan, then, is the result of external and internal appraisal. External appraisal includes the identification of the club’s threats and opportunities in the outside environment, which establish a set of key factors for the club’s success.

Note: For more detailed information on understanding the internal and external environments, see section 1.4.9 on page 33.

1.1.5.1 Strengths and Weaknesses
Strengths and weaknesses are internal to the club.

A strength is, expectedly, something very positive about the club or what your club is good at doing. Conversely, a weakness is where the club falls short or has a limitation. Curiously, in conducting a strategic SWOT analysis, a list of strengths may also include perceived weaknesses, and vice versa.

For example, that a certain club facility is a grand-style, 150-year-old architectural treasure may be a strength in that the club’s age adds value to the members’ perception of their club experience.

On the other hand, the facility’s age would undoubtedly be a factor in several internal problems – high maintenance costs, old technologies, faulty wiring and out-dated plumbing.

Do not be overly concerned that a strength in one sense could also be considered a weakness in another sense. We have all likely heard the tale of a club GM/COO and president who convinced the board and membership that the operational difficulties associated with maintaining an antebellum mansion as a club facility were insurmountable. As you might guess, the building was razed and a modern and efficient facility was constructed in its place. But the new building’s sterile atmosphere lacked character – the new club was little more than a modern banquet hall.

Lists of strengths and weakness are developed during work and brainstorming sessions, formal surveys or informal conversations with and interviews of members, staff and suppliers. This process is often referred to as “strategy by laundry–lists.”

Following this collection of data, a session – or several sessions – would be held to help ensure agreement and consensus. During this process of “consideration and assessment,” perceived strengths and weaknesses are considered individually in terms of relativity and duplicity.

For example, some members might report that the club is too expensive. Management and the board must use honesty and sound judgment to determine whether this is a valid statement of weakness or simply a relative weakness – a general statement that could be attributed to all private clubs.

Eliminating duplicity requires judgment in combining similar strengths and weaknesses, in order to avoid redundancy or duplication of elements.

Suppose a club has the highest USGA slope rating of any area golf course. A club could perceive this as a strength – it may be a prestigious award that earns bragging rights; or, the difficulty lures the finest golfers to the club; or, the undulating terrain is spectacular in its beauty and elevation change.
But the fact that the club has the highest USGA slope rating may also be a problem if the course's difficulty frustrates golfers with average to high handicaps (thereby severely limiting the market for the club as an “everyday home course”) or if the difficulty creates an average round time of five hours (longer than the typical average round of four hours).

In this case, the listing depends on whether the slope rating is more of a strength or a weakness for the club.

Once complete, the internal assessment of strengths and weaknesses helps establish a bundle of distinctive competencies and qualities that the club is adept at either doing or being, along with a set of issues that the club is not good at either doing or being.

In conducting this analysis, remember that strengths and weaknesses are *internal* to the club.

### 1.1.5.2 Opportunities and Threats

Opportunities and threats are *external* to the club. An opportunity is something that the club could explore capitalizing on, either in terms of competition or a particular situation. A threat can be that of competition or of legislation – any external situation that presents a challenge for the club.

As with determination of strengths and weaknesses, the success in determining opportunities and threats lies in careful analysis and judgment. Often, clubs are quick to dismiss a finding as insignificant; but no findings are insignificant. In fact, those who are particularly successful in identifying opportunities and threats are those who can identify emerging trends that might otherwise go unnoticed.

An opportunity based on competition may be that a neighboring replacement club burned to the ground and present zoning only allows them to build back 50-percent of their square footage. This creates an opportunity for a neighboring growth club because the rebuilt club may no longer have the capacity to handle its former membership.

A situational opportunity for a remote club may be that the state transportation department has approved the construction of a new bridge, which will put the club within 20 miles of the major population center of the area, less distant than its current location 40 miles from the populated area. The club will become more geographically accessible and, thus, potentially more desirable to a larger number of people – a clear opportunity for growth.

Threats can be classified similarly. A threat from competition may include plans for a major new country club to be built within three miles of the target club. The target club would be threatened because of increased competition for members – whether new or existing.

A governmental threat may be the lowered blood-alcohol level requirement (BAC) for DUI or DWI offenses. Such a mandate might then threaten the club’s beverage sales and might also put the club at greater risk for alcohol liability and liquor-related lawsuits.

### 1.1.6 Strategy Statement

During the SWOT analysis, a club can propose actions based on four configurations of converging elements.

If the club determines a high degree of opportunity in an area from the external analysis, along with a high degree of strength in the corresponding internal analysis, the club has tremendous ability to capitalize.

For the club with a new bridge bringing the club closer to the population center (external opportunity), if the club is a “growth club” with a number of memberships available for sale – a relative strength due to availability – then the club has a tremendous opportunity to sell new memberships.
The following chart illustrates this example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Strengths</th>
<th>Internal Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>External Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New bridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the club instead determines a high degree of opportunity in an area from the external analysis, but a high degree of weakness in the corresponding internal analysis, the club has limited ability to capitalize.

If that same club is a replacement club — with few memberships available — it has a relative weakness due to availability and has only a limited opportunity to capitalize on selling memberships. The example can be represented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Strengths</th>
<th>Internal Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Replacement club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>External Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New bridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In another analysis, if the club determines a high degree of threat in an area from the external analysis and a high degree of strength in the corresponding internal analysis, the club has the ability to respond defensively.

If the state lowers the BAC requirement for DUIs, but the club has an outstanding alcohol awareness program in place at the club, the club has the ability to minimize potential exposure due to the strength of its current program.

The example could be illustrated in this manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Strengths</th>
<th>Internal Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol awareness program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>External Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowered tolerance for DUI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a fourth scenario, if the club determines a high degree of threat in an area from the external analysis and a high degree of weakness in the corresponding internal analysis, the club faces its worst operating position.

If a new, developer-owned club will open next year within two miles of a target club that has not provided acceptable service to its members, the target club faces a severe threat to which it likely cannot respond effectively.

**Choosing a Strategy**

The object of effective strategic planning is to capitalize on a club’s strengths in a way that helps the club develop sustainable advantages in its marketplace. After all, all GM/COOs – and boards, members, other staff, too – want their particular club to be the club of choice.

To develop and highlight these advantages, clubs can choose one or several of the strategic methods listed in the following discussion.

**Enhancing Differentiation**

Success from this perspective requires that a club create strategic initiatives that enhance differentiation or concentrate dollars to enhance a strength. Thus, the club becomes more appealing in one particular area.

The internal SWOT analysis includes the identification of the club’s internal, organizational strengths and weaknesses – which illustrates a set of distinctive competencies. To enhance differentiation, the club simply focuses on improving a strength.

For example, a club in a competitive area with high demand for golf times might add lights, thereby allowing play long past sundown. Such a situation could be illustrated in this manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Strengths</th>
<th>Internal Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to innovate</td>
<td>Low availability for increased rounds of golf on present course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollars available for capital improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Opportunities</th>
<th>External Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High demand for golf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alternately, a *Golf Digest*-rated top-100 club golf course could spend an extra $200,000 on grooming and conditioning – thus concentrating capital dollars to enhance an already superior aspect in order to attract new members, further satisfy current members and, perhaps, move up in the *Digest* ratings.
Enhancing Superiority
A club using this strategy endeavors to exploit a competitor club’s weaknesses or to emphasize its own non-competitive strength.

Exploiting weakness: For example, to exploit another club’s weakness, a club could re-build all of its greens with pure, Bent grass greens, thus highlighting the course condition of a competitor, which has bumpy, 25-year-old Poa Annua-infested greens – not an ideal course by comparison.

The following chart illustrates this situation of exploiting weaknesses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Strengths</th>
<th>Internal Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to innovate</td>
<td>Low availability for increased rounds of golf on present course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollars available for capital improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitor has Poa Annua-infested greens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enhancing non-competitive strength: A club emphasizing a non-competing strength may publicize the club-owned bowling center, equestrian center, “dive-in” movies in the pool during summer or indoor shooting range – or any similarly unique and existing, non-competing strengths.

Enhancing a non-competitive strength might look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Strengths</th>
<th>Internal Weaknesses</th>
<th>External Opportunities</th>
<th>External Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bowling center</td>
<td></td>
<td>Competitor clubs offer only golf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equestrian center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pool “dive-in” movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoor shooting range</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Innovating
Clubs interested in innovating would develop new products or services that do not presently exist at the club or at competing clubs.

The list of potential new products and services is endless. The key is to innovate into areas that will be appreciated and used by the members – or at least be perceived as providing new, different and desirable products and services.
Examples of innovating would include adding a club dry-cleaners, a tailor shop, a stylist, casual-use office space, a retail-type convenience store, a business center or a club-sponsored American Express card. This example of innovating is illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Strengths</th>
<th>Internal Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to add new products or services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excess space available in clubhouse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollars available for capital improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Opportunities</th>
<th>External Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitor clubs unwilling or unable to add new products or services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Revolution**

Revolution is an effective initiative, especially when the market requires drastic measures for improvement, whereby a club challenges a competitor's fundamental strength. Revolution changes the fundamental and accepted way of conducting business.

For example, a growth club might adopt a policy of non-discriminatory tee times. Depending on the local condition, this may well be defined as a “super-revolutionary initiative.” However, aside from its social implications, revolution is an extremely effective strategic initiative for a club hoping to gain new members and distinguish itself in the market from old-line, established competitors.

Revolution could be illustrated in this manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Strengths</th>
<th>Internal Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No existing tradition or policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to use revolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Opportunities</th>
<th>External Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitor clubs are old-line, traditional, unwilling to change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand from female golfing community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once a club has identified and chosen a strategy, the strategy is then written as a statement. This statement states how external opportunities are exploited by the club’s internal strengths. Threats and weaknesses, in the strategy statement, are either avoided or mitigated with suggested counter-measures.

1.1.7 Budgets

**Normal Capital Budgeting**

The majority of clubs do not have unlimited capital reserves. In fact, most clubs do not fund depreciation.

Instead of funding depreciation, they typically spend about two to three percent of gross revenues on normal capital – items such as furniture, fixtures and equipment.

Your strategic plan should help prioritize capital budgeting.

**Project Capital Budgeting**

Often clubs refer to major re-building, remodeling and “adding-on” as “project capital.” Funding for project capital may come from capital reserves (unspent capital), a supplemental monetary commitment from normal capital over time, assumption of debt or an assessment of the members.

Assessment may come in the form of a cash requirement, either as a lump sum or as payments over time, to fund the project. The strategic plan should also prioritize project capital budgeting.

**Operations Budgeting**

The process of operations budgeting by department is a tremendously time-consuming part of effective club management. Operations budgets consider how and when revenues will flow into the club and how and when expenses will flow out of the club.

Operations budgets should be created in painstaking detail and should be broken down into expected increments. When completed, operations budgets should answer the questions “What?” “Why?” “When?” and “How Much?”

If the membership department is budgeting its revenues, budgetary assumptions would be supported by answers to those questions:

*What?* “The goal is 20 new members for the year.” (Also answers “How Much?”)

*Why?* “The club is a growth club and, consistent with the strategic plan, the club will allow a net growth of 20 new members per year.”

*When?* This would be a statement that depends on seasonality—during the year when the new members will join the club.

*Consistent with the club’s recruitment pattern over the last five years, we forecast that the new joins will occur on the following dates: February 2, March 2, April 2, May 4, June 3, July 2, August 2, September 2 and October 1.*

These written assumptions help explain any subsequent variance – they help determine whether variances are valid or simply the results of timing issues.

Operations budgets should flow from the club wide grand strategy and the departmental strategy.
1.1.8 Action Plan

The action plan comes together after planning and budgeting are completed. Often referred to as “operations” or “implementation,” the action plan is the realization of the planning effort – the practical action of the credo, “Plan the work, work the plan.”

Strategy and operations meet during action planning. The strategy is what the club will do. Operations – the action plan – is how the club will do it. There are four scenarios in which strategy meets operations. Knowing those enable an understanding of how the implementation is likely to occur.

In the best case, the club has a clear strategy and effective operations; the likely result is that the club has enjoyed success in the past and will also do so in the future.

If the club has a clear strategy but ineffective operations, the club has likely enjoyed some success in the past; however, future success is in doubt.

On the other hand, if the club has an unclear strategy but effective operations, the club has probably enjoyed success in the past, yet future success doubtful.

In the worst scenario, the club has an unclear strategy and ineffective operations. Most likely, the club has failed in the past and will likely fail in the future unless major changes are implemented.

These potential scenarios in which an action plan might be implemented could be illustrated in this manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operations (How)</th>
<th>Strategy (What)</th>
<th>Success in past and future&lt;br&gt;(+/+)</th>
<th>Success in past; doubtful future.&lt;br&gt;(+/-)</th>
<th>Failure in past and future&lt;br&gt;(-/+)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Operations</td>
<td>Good Strategy (+)</td>
<td>Success in past and future&lt;br&gt;(+/+)</td>
<td>Success in past; doubtful future.&lt;br&gt;(+/-)</td>
<td>Failure in past and future&lt;br&gt;(-/+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Operations</td>
<td>Bad Strategy (-)</td>
<td>Success in past; doubtful future.&lt;br&gt;(-/+)</td>
<td>Failure in past and future&lt;br&gt;(-/+)</td>
<td>Failure in past and future&lt;br&gt;(-/+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.1.9 Assessing Progress
Whatever form the action plan takes, being able to measure whether the club is accomplishing its goals, objectives and strategic initiatives is vital.

The foundational element for controlling and monitoring progress is a connection to the “counts” and “times” – the objective measures – created in the budgeting process.

For example, a renovation of the mixed grill, which was approved in the capital budget, would have developed from a strategic initiative and would include assumptions of what, why, when, and how much. The objective measures for evaluating its success – hours and dollars spent – are the answers to “when” and “how much.”

Monitoring and assessing progress should be continuous, occurring during the renovation as well as after completion of the project. Monitoring serves two purposes:

1. Keeps all departments and functional areas on track.
2. Ensures that accomplishments move the club toward long-range goals (those outlined in the strategic plan).

1.2 Conducting a Service Analysis
NOTE: Please refer to the Service Analysis Template (Document 3.1), Service Audit Form (Document 3.2) and Service Management Assessment Form (Document 3.3) to support this section.

A service analysis is a valuable strategic tool for a manager, whether he or she is new to the club or a long-standing leader. Such analysis provides an analytical “snapshot” of the club’s present service, which can be used as a basis for developing long-term goals and objectives.

Member service is a concept that club managers are always focused on providing. Dr. William Martin’s Quality Service: What Every Hospitality Manager Needs to Know (Prentice Hall, 2002) is an excellent reference tool – a “how-to” service guide – for managers and includes concepts that have been adapted here to relate to the private club industry.

By comparing the club’s current, actual service practices to ideal, benchmark service standards, the club can create and implement developmental objectives.

For instance, if an objective service survey were to be completed before institution of training and other developmental programs, progress toward benchmark standards can be measured accurately in relation to achieved objectives.

This method gives managers hard evidence, rather than simply feelings or intuition, that programs either get positive results or need adjustment. Effective strategic management insists that you create reliable ways to measure the results of your efforts and initiatives.

Further, as an effective strategic manager, you should be directing your efforts toward those objective measures – counting everything that you can count and timing everything that you can time.

The analysis itself integrates various disciplines within the club industry, such as human relations, management, decision-making, policy formation and marketing. In conducting a service analysis at a club, evaluators should utilize conceptual, analytical, assessment and decision-making skills to complete two major phases of analysis: Service Operations Analysis and Service Management Assessment.
Service Operations Analysis
In the first process, an evaluation team observes and rates — and writes a critical analysis of — the efforts of the club’s service providers during daily operations.

To complete the assessment, evaluators should spend an average of 10 hours at the club observing operations and report their findings according to seven procedural dimensions and eight personal dimensions listed below:

A. Procedural Dimensions:
   1. Timeliness
   2. Incremental Flow
   3. Anticipation
   4. Communication
   5. Member Feedback
   6. Accommodation
   7. Supervision and Organization

B. Personal Dimensions:
   1. Attitude: Body Language
   2. Attitude: Tone of Voice
   3. Tact
   4. Attentiveness
   5. “Naming Names”
   6. Guidance
   7. Selling Skills
   8. Gracious Problem-Solving

Service Management Assessment
During the second phase, an evaluation team observes and rates – and writes a critical analysis of – the efforts of the club’s management team in creating a service-based infrastructure and culture.

To complete the evaluation, evaluators report findings according to these 10 dimensions:

1. Quality Customer Service Values
2. Organizational Climate and Leadership
3. Quality Service Standards
4. Jobs and Hiring
5. Training
6. Customer Feedback
7. Response to Customers
8. Service Provider Feedback
9. Recognition and Rewards
10. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

As with any evaluation, assessment or survey, objectivity is paramount.

Though this manual effectively directs the entire strategic planning process, the service analysis is one aspect of the planning for which a club may be best-served with some sort of external input.

A GM/COO might create an “inside” evaluation team of managers, select staff and department heads, but should also invite an outside team of evaluators. That outside team would offer the best opportunity for a truly objective analysis. External evaluators would not likely have a vested interest in the outcome of the analysis, nor would they fear reprisal — as a staff member or department head might – should the analysis effectively risk his or her position at the club.

An effective, yet simple, method to recruit an objective evaluation team would involve partnering with the manager of another club – perhaps a friend or otherwise well-known colleague – to share the task of analysis.
The partner club would provide an observation team composed of its own managers and staff; likewise, your club would send a similar team. Thus, each club and each evaluation team experiences the analysis both as evaluator and target.

Often, simply the freshness of observing the service practices of another club aids in the improvement and development of a club’s service initiatives. The task of critiquing another club’s operation also inherently causes evaluators to analyze their own operation more closely, adding another, more personal level of self-assessment.

One might argue, however, that enlisting a “mediocre” service team to evaluate an “outstanding” team would be a fruitless effort – the already superior staff would gain little insight and may even be evaluated unfairly by a less capable staff.

Yet the effectiveness of the analysis lies less in the outcomes and perceived benefits of the process than in the actual process itself. No doubt the superior staff would be “graded” as such; but just as there is no “perfect” vision, there can be no “perfect” service analysis. Further, there is no reason the supposed “superior” staff can’t find an even more well-trained, a more efficient and friendlier staff to evaluate – and to be evaluated by.

The idea that underlies this entire process, especially the service analysis, is that excellent member service is both the foundation for and the focus of any club’s efforts, strategic or otherwise.

1.3 Conducting a Strategic and Long-Term Planning Survey

**NOTE:** Please refer to the Survey Cover Letter Example (Document 3.4) and Strategy and Long-Term Planning Survey Example (Document 3.5) to support this section.

CMAA’s Premier Club Services (PCS) Department reminds you that your job as a club manager and chief operating officer is to “think like a member.” Your goal is to develop and maintain services that are meaningful and attractive to current and prospective members.

Good club member research will help you do just that.

Conducting a strategic and long-range planning survey for the club is a daunting, yet rewarding, initiative. But before conducting a club survey, the GM/COO, board and other management personnel must decide its purpose.

A survey is a great way to collect data, which can be turned into valuable information. If not done judiciously, however, a survey can turn into a huge, unfocused document that will upset and frustrate members and staff.

Moreover, the survey can be particularly frustrating if the data is wasted – if nothing develops from your efforts.

Surveys are usually conducted at clubs for one or more of these three reasons:

1. To persuade. The club might collect member views and opinions before undergoing a major renovation.

2. To create or modify a service or product. The golf department might modify its starting-time procedure based on member input.

3. To understand member behavior. The club might undertake a club-wide, comprehensive survey with no preconceived outcome in mind except to simply understand its members’ wants and needs so that it might serve them better. This is the most strategic purpose.

These three reasons may, and often do, overlap in a club survey. Whatever your purpose, ensure that you are being realistic in your expectations of your survey.

Deciding the purpose of the survey, and directing the survey to that one purpose, helps keep the survey focused and ensures that each of the following steps of the survey process supports that effort.
1. **Decide a purpose:** Whether the survey is intended to persuade, to modify a service or to gather information about member behavior, deciding purpose allows you to focus your questions.

2. **Assemble questions:** Creating the questionnaire is undoubtedly the most time-consuming part of the process and should be done carefully and judiciously. Ensure that each question addresses one – and only one – specific issue or topic. Do not, for example, ask a member what he or she might “like best.” Instead, ask what products or services the member would be “likely to use or buy.”

Keep the questions brief, but clear. Short questions are less likely to be read incorrectly and more likely to be interpreted in the same manner. And use “everyday” vocabulary – call it “the grill,” not the “informal dining area.”

CMAA’s Bookmart Department has published a resource titled *Club Membership Surveys* (Item #1147) that will provide tremendous insight into this process. To purchase this resource, call (800) 847-6977 or visit CMAA’s online MarketPlace at [www.cmaa.org/bookmart/list](http://www.cmaa.org/bookmart/list).

3. **Choose a number:** Members are not likely to fill out a survey that takes any longer than 10 minutes to complete. That time threshold decreases dramatically if survey is distributed more frequently.

As a rule of thumb, members will not object to completing a 10-minute survey once each year. If you really publicize the importance of a club wide, strategic and long-range planning survey, you can probably get an excellent response to a 20-minute survey every other year.

After deciding on the number of questions, you should test the questionnaire for length, clarity and interest. Get feedback on your questions from a select group of members.

4. **Plan a frequency:** Frequency, like the number of questions, largely determines your response rate. Some clubs survey quarterly; others survey every three to five years.

Those clubs that survey quarterly are most successful when the questionnaire asks no more than 10 questions and is quite easy for the member to complete and return. Those surveying annually or less frequently can get away with longer, more comprehensive surveys – the ideal case for strategic and long-range planning surveys.

5. **Decide the target audience:** This may sound obvious, but it is important to survey those who are interested in or use the facility in question. If your club allows annual members (non-owners) to use social facilities but not the golf course, do not send those annual members a survey about rebuilding the golf course greens.

6. **Decide a method for data collection and analysis:** Will you administer the survey in-house or through an outside firm? How will the project be staged? Who will analyze the data?

This is typically the point at which most clubs decide to consult with an outside source. If you take this route, remember the purpose – the intention and motivation – for your survey. Objectivity is critical.

All CMAA members have access to a particularly beneficial source for a variety of survey services. CMAA’s PCS Department offers individualized, objective and effective survey services – from questionnaire development to tabulation and analysis. As an added benefit, PCS subscribers receive a $1,000 discount on their customized surveys, which begin at $8,000. If you are interested in using CMAA for your next survey project, please contact the PCS Department at (703) 739-9500.

7. **Decide how the results will be disseminated:** Most memberships assume that if you are going to ask about a product, service or facility, then you are going to develop an action plan to somehow change it – and that you will inform the members about the plan to do so.

You can do this through your club’s newsletter or online forum or through separate and specific mailings, e-mails or other media, depending on the inclinations and expectations of your membership.
Informing the members about the purpose of the survey is important and is related to how you will disseminate the survey results. It is acceptable to tell members that you are unsure about what actions, if any, will be taken. However, if members feel that the survey wasted their time, they will respond less often and less enthusiastically on this and subsequent surveys.

The survey example included in this resource was developed as a guide for strategic and long-range surveying (Documents 3.4 and 3.5). As such, it will help generate data that can be used to determine member satisfaction with overall facilities and services club wide. It does not focus on selling proprietary services or products – as may be the case for a questionnaire developed by an outside firm, especially those offering to conduct a “free” member survey.

Demographic questions are included in the sample survey in order to help you track your responses according to members’ ages, membership categories, income levels and other variables that may be of interest. This section, and each other section included, can be used in its current form or customized for your club’s particular needs.

While income or salary levels may be a sensitive issue for your membership, it is a very valuable piece of demographic information that will allow for more precise analysis. You may feel such questions are improper to ask of your members. To gauge potential responses, ask – verbally and informally – certain members for their opinion on the topic. Certainly, you do not want to upset the membership. However, you do not want to miss information from a rich variable. Remember, the survey is intended to be an anonymous process and this should be emphasized when the survey is introduced to the general membership.

Whatever your decision with respect to demographic questions, proceed with caution.

1.4 Strategic Implementation Analysis

NOTE: Please refer to the Strategic Implementation Analysis Form (Document 3.6) to support this section.

Strategic implementation analysis is the process of examining a club’s efforts to ensure that operations efforts are driven by strategic initiatives.

Often, clubs spend tremendous effort – in time and money – on strategic planning, but fail to integrate that strategic plan into operations. The flurry of day-to-day operations creates a disconnect between what the club would like to become (its ideal, as defined by its strategic plan) and what it is (its current state, as defined by operations and implementation).

The Strategic Implementation Analysis Form included in this resource allows a manager to rate how well the club aligns with and coordinates its strategic plan with implementation, and to bring the two aspects more into alignment, if necessary. Ideally, operations flow naturally from the overall strategic efforts of the club.

1.4.1 The Grand Strategy

Has the board of governors determined what it wants the overall club to be – in both nature and direction – over the next several years?

This effort is perhaps the most fundamental of the strategic planning elements. Much like a road map for the club, the grand strategy provides a direction for the club and should be the foundation and reference point for everything the club thinks, says and does.

This grand strategy should be captured and recorded for reference and memorialization – and memorization.
1.4.2 Agreement
Is there agreement about the grand strategy? As the foundation for everything the club thinks, says and does, the
grand strategy should be agreed upon by all board members, officers and senior staff of the club.

Do not be surprised if agreement does not come easily. Agreement develops over time. However difficult to achieve,
agreement is valuable. Efforts made to bring the board of governors, members and staff into agreement and alignment
creates a strong club identity – a club brand.

1.4.3 Are You in the Loop?
Though unlikely, it is conceivable that the club does have an agreed upon “big plan” – the grand strategy – but that
management has been included neither in the development or planning process nor in the outcome of the decision.

As a GM/COO, you are not only responsible for helping to drive the planning process, but also for implementing the
elements of the strategic plan on the operational level. You can be a much more effective manager during the plan
facilitation process if you take an active role in the development of the grand strategic plan.

1.4.4 Have You Shared the Strategic Plan?
Assume that you are familiar with the club’s grand strategic plan. Are you sharing that plan with your subordinates –
your direct reports – as well as every other club employee? Do you reinforce the importance of that plan in everything
that you think, do and say at the club? Do your key managers share the same vision of the club’s strategic direction?

If you know the strategic plan, share it with staff members and committee members with whom you work. If you are
a senior-level manager and work directly with the board of governors, be sure that you refer to and reinforce the
importance of the strategic plan when discussing any issues.

1.4.5 Check the Strategic Plan for Clarity
If you were riding an elevator from the 20th floor of a building down to the first floor and a prospective member
asked you to explain your club’s strategic plan – or your mission or vision – before that member exited at the lobby,
could you do it?

You – the GM/COO, a board member or a manager – should be able to state your strategic plan simply, clearly and
in less than 30 seconds. Impossible? If you would answer “Yes,” then you need to practice reciting the strategic plan
until repeating it becomes second nature – and then keep on practicing.

If you can’t explain your club’s strategy clearly and concisely before the elevator door opens, you are stating the strate-
gy in terms that are too complicated.

1.4.6 Use the Strategic Plan to Create New Club Services
A clear strategy allows your department heads to align their daily operations with the strategy and to guide the cre-
ation of new services, products and markets. Additionally, a clear strategy suggests services, products and markets
that your club will not pursue.

This “here-and-now” application of the strategic planning process is key to the success of the club wide effort – and
has a tremendously important focusing quality.

Consider the scenario suggested earlier in the visioneering discussion: A member visits another club and returns with
suggestions that your club should adopt. A clear strategy can be an effective filter for these sorts of ideas. Would – or
should – the member’s suggestions fit in at the club?

A clear strategic plan, like the vision and mission that help define it, is a foundational element of the club.
1.4.7 Strategic and Long-Range Planning Should Complement Each Other

The operational foci of strategic and long-range planning lie mainly in capital improvement projects, land utilization and the development and maintenance of an integrated, multiple-year plan consistent with the vision and mission of the club.

For example, if the multiple-year plan spans five years, year one is the operational year, each subsequent year moves down one step, the plan is updated and a new five-year term is created – that is, the ideally integrated plan is continuously updated.

Just as the strategic and long-range plans should complement each other, so too should the hierarchy charged with those planning efforts work fluidly and consistently. There is much variation among clubs’ strategic and long-range planning efforts, but typically one of the following three scenarios occurs in clubs.

The least desirable organization is the club that has neither a strategic planning nor a long-range planning committee. Clubs without either committee are at a distinct operational disadvantage; their product offerings, markets and services tend to develop as reactions to member comments, which suggests lack of cohesion and structure.

If the formation of strategic and long-range planning committees is currently impractical for your club, a slightly better situation would be an *ad hoc* committee that occasionally reviews strategic and long-range planning efforts.

The second sort of configuration merges strategic planning with long-range planning into one standing committee. While this is often a very effective model, the demands on the committee members are numerous. The success of the single committee depends on the organization of work – what are members of this committee charged with accomplishing?

If duties are not carefully decided, assigned and prioritized, the committee can become overwhelmed with work – especially in an existing club that establishes a combination long-range planning and strategy committee for the first time.

The third governance model separates long-range planning and strategic planning into two discrete standing committees. The functional advantage of having two committees is the potential division of work among the volunteer member-composed committees – there is not an unreasonable time commitment required of either.

The main disadvantage is the separation of planning issues and coordination of the committee’s efforts. Simply stated, strategic considerations and discussion should not occur separately from long-range planning efforts.

Given these three scenarios, the one most common – and perhaps most practical for the average club – is the single-committee model. Though the demands on members are larger, coordination of effort is streamlined, which is often the most important consideration in planning efforts.

Clubs without a strategic planning committee should create one.

1.4.8 The Strategic Plan as a Living Element

Is strategy the blood which courses throughout the body of the club? If not, it should be.

A club’s strategic plan should be the “nourishment” for everything that a club plans, projects and budgets – it is the lifeblood of all discussion at the club.

Though at times you might feel frustrated and confused about why it seems as if all planning and operations are funneled through the strategic planning committee, take heart; that is the very purpose of the committee.

When a strategic planning committee is established in an existing club, the committee should be thought of as a “gatekeeper” or a filter for operations. This is an enormous responsibility for two reasons: the strategic plan flows from vision and mission; operations flow from the strategic plan.
Because strategy flows from vision and mission, all new deliberations must be “filtered” to ensure that they are consistent with those most basic tenets of the club. While that may seem a daunting task at first, when everyone becomes attuned to strategy as the basis for implementation, the “filtering” process soon becomes a conditioned response.

Ideally, all board members, all committees and all levels of operations will ask themselves the strategic question: “Is this consistent with the club’s strategy?”

If the operational consideration is consistent with the strategic plan, the conversation should continue toward implementation. If it is not consistent, the consideration should be either discarded or “tabled” for future discussion and possible implementation.

The strategic planning committee is also an important filter because all current practices must be filtered through the strategic plan – the committee becomes an evaluation tool.

Examine the flow of decision-making for a moment. Vision, mission, club wide goals and objectives flow from the executive management team (in most cases, including the GM/COO) to the GM/COO for implementation through the various departments in daily operations.

If, in this linear flow of an existing and functioning club, a filter is inserted between the GM/COO and implementation, new decisions flow through a relatively clean and coordinated system.

If there is “contamination” in daily operations that were never previously filtered, those daily operations should be filtered to ensure that everything is sanitized – and aligned with the grand strategic plan. Otherwise, filtered operations mix with un-filtered operations, to the detriment of the club’s strategic vision.

1.4.9 Understanding the Internal and External Environment

Strategic planning includes an internal analysis of what a club is adept at doing and where it falls short, as well as an outward look at the external environment and its challenges and opportunities.

As discussed previously, the SWOT analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats indicates a club’s position. SWOT may be used on a macro level to evaluate the club as an overall entity or on a micro level to get a “snapshot” of a particular aspect of the club, such as the golf course, the food and beverage department or membership.

During a SWOT analysis, a club is its own critic. Besides providing perspective and understanding of the club’s position, SWOT supports and helps create a clear strategic plan.

A SWOT analysis should be performed at the club- and department-level at least once every year. The fundamental success of a SWOT analysis is the establishment of specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

1.4.10 Using the Strategic Plan to Determine and Allocate Capital

A club’s strategy should support capital requests. Throughout the budgeting process, the strategic plan should play a major part in prioritization and distribution of capital.

For example, suppose that the greens committee and golf committee have supported a proposal by the GM/COO, the golf course superintendent and the director of golf to begin hand-mowing greens instead of tri-plexing greens, to start tri-plexing fairways instead of gang-mowing fairways and to begin gang-mowing rough instead of flail-mowing rough.

The economic impact of the mowing changes has been stated in terms of operations (increased labor) and capital expenses (purchasing hand-mowers and gas carts with trailer combinations for transport). The board of governors has approved the proposal as consistent with the strategic initiative (to increase golf course conditioning by 25 percent within two years) and has agreed to a timeframe for implementation.
This strategic initiative helps determine the capital need for purchasing nine reel hand-mowers, as well as the shift of equipment resulting in elimination of flail mowers. The overall strategic plan assigns high prioritize to the initiative, since an increase of 25 percent in course conditioning within two years is a stated strategic goal (which presumably has interim objectives associated with the goal).

Why did this proposal get approved?

As capital resources are more limited, the likelihood of approval increases because the initiative is a main aspect of the grand strategic plan. Moreover, the request can be tied to a discrete strategic initiative, was proposed by managers from separate committees in agreement with the GM/COO, details the impact of the purchase to both capital and operations and, perhaps most importantly, can be measured objectively – the effectiveness of the initiative is countable.

1.4.11 Using Objective Measures

We often speak in general business conversation about the importance of using objective measures – and we have emphasized that fact here and elsewhere. Objective measures are quantitative – “counts” and “times.”

*Count everything that you can count, and time everything that you can time.*

Goal creation should flow from the strategic plan. The goals that are created should have an objective element that can be quantified in reporting, evaluating and rewarding. More precisely, we should use objective measures in operational results and in strategic accomplishments.

Clubs, as well as other service-oriented organizations, have a tendency to create, report, evaluate and reward or punish based on subjective measures. Subjective measures are imprecise and deal mostly with feelings and generalized conclusions.

The malaise of subjectivity affects each of these four perspectives: creating, reporting, evaluating and rewarding or punishing. While there is a place for subjective thinking, it is best supported by objective measures.

1.4.11.1 Goal-Creating

Whether short-, mid- or long-term in focus, goals should be written in a manner that enables them to be measured objectively – timed or counted. A subjective goal is written in imprecise or incomplete terms:

*We will improve member service in the mixed grill.*

On the other hand, a well-written goal includes five critical characteristics: it is “SMART” – specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound.

**Specific:** A specific, well-written goal will answer several questions, which themselves are a guide for writing the goal. Consider the service in the grill:

- Who will be responsible? The grill staff.
- What is the goal? Lower the service contact time at the grill lectern from 120 seconds to 30 seconds.
- Where will the effort be focused? The grill.
- When will the effort take place? Between January 1 and June 30.
- Why will this goal be achieved? Members rate promptness of service upon arrival at the grill as poor.
- How will we accomplish this goal? Meeting, greeting and seating will become a high priority for servers. If necessary, we will add a dedicated meeter-greeter-seater position to accomplish this goal.
- Who cares whether we do this? The dining members in the grill.

**Measurable:** A goal should include an objective method for evaluation. For example: *There is a semi-annual member survey, a scalar range in place (“1” being “poor” and “5” being “excellent”), a discrete question (47) which addresses this specific issue and historical data (past survey responses) against which we can measure improvement.*
Acceptable: Ensure that the goal is agreed upon by those who will be responsible for achieving it. For example: *The department manager has met with the grill employees, has discussed the past ratings, has related the ratings to the strategic initiative of improvement and has asked the staff members what they think they can do to improve.*

Realistic: The goal may be difficult, but it must be achievable. For example: *We have established that a rating moving from “poor” to “meets expectations” is realistic.*

Time-bound: When is the goal effort going to begin and end? *The effort will occur over a six-month period, January 1 through June 30.*

Effective objective-creating uses the basic language of the subjective example but adds details by answering the suggested questions is guided by the SMART guidelines and relates directly to the strategic plan, as follows:

**Strategic Initiative:**
*We will improve member service in the mixed grill by 25 percent within two years.*

**Problem:**
*We currently average 120 seconds to meet and greet a member at the grill lectern. Members perceive this as poor (“1” on a 5-point scale).*

**Goal:**
*Between January 1 and June 30, we will lower that average “meet time” to 30 seconds and will measure improvement using question 47 on the next semi-annual survey, which addresses “promptness of service” upon arrival at the grill. In lowering the service contact time, we will consider the goal achieved if we score an average of “3” (“meets expectations”) or better on the next semi-annual survey.*

**Method:**
*We will institute a policy whereby meeting, greeting and seating will become a high priority for servers. If necessary, we will add a dedicated meeter-greeter-seater position to our staff to ensure that we achieve the goal.*

**1.4.11.2 Reporting**

Reporting is an oral and written managerial function requiring succinct updates regarding progress toward goal achievement.

At times, the succinctness of the reporting function is clouded by dense and flowery descriptions – subjective reporting – and is not supported by facts and figures – objective reporting. This is particularly the case when the news being reported is less than desirable. The person reporting emphasizes generalities and glosses over details.

Objective reporting, on the other hand, includes textual descriptions to set the general tone of the update, whether positive or negative, and quantifies the descriptions to provide details for the audience. Those details include measurements and explanations of how those counts and times relate to goals and objectives and ultimately to the departmental strategic plan and, if appropriate, the grand strategic plan of the club.

To highlight the difference in reporting methods, consider this example of a subjective report at an operational meeting for a food and beverage department:

*We had a strong turnout for the Mothers Day brunch in the grill; the weather was pleasant; we did a good job meeting, greeting and seating and everyone raved about the food and the service. The members would really like to have more functions like this.*

As you noticed, this report could have been copied from the previous year’s report – with only an update on the weather. Unfortunately, a large percentage of reports at clubs and other organizations are delivered in this manner. As a manager, it is within your power to help change this type of behavior, which has little impact on operations and little concern for the club’s strategic plan.
An objective report at that same meeting might read as follows:

_We had a great turnout for the Mothers Day brunch in the grill. We forecast 225 covers and served 247. The weather was sunny and 75 degrees, which brought more members out than we expected. We added a dedicated meeter-greeter-seater, who did an effective job of helping achieve our 30-second “meet time” goal. Review of the security camera tape at the grill entrance showed an average of 28 seconds for meeting-and-greeting, so we are showing good progress. Review of member comment cards showed a score 10 percent higher than for the same function last year. Generally, the comments from members suggest that both food and service were very good and that they like the option of either buffet or menu service._

Objective reporting takes little additional time in the operations meeting and is much improved in its ability to deliver a meaningful message that the function was a success. The measurements allow other managers at the meeting to get a better sense of the success of the function.

Effective GM/COOs should counsel their direct reports to always use measurements in reporting, especially as it relates to achievement of goals. Further, GM/COOs should consult with their managers to agree on consistency of information and format in such reports.

The reporting function is not the place to be creative.

### 1.4.11.3 Evaluating

Evaluation is the managerial review function – often referred to as “performance review.” Formal evaluation should take place quarterly or at least semi-annually. Annual evaluation is not frequent enough for the person being evaluated to improve areas of concern or to receive encouragement on and appreciation for progress on areas of achievement.

Informal evaluation should be conducted almost weekly or monthly. The size and complexity of the club hierarchy, the personality of the supervisor and of the employee and the personality of the club itself all help dictate how often this review should occur.

Informal evaluation may occur between employee and supervisor while walking the employee’s work area during an informal inspection or during a periodic variance meeting. The employee, no matter his or her level, needs to get reinforcement from his or her supervisor – whether department head, GM/COO or club president – on a regular basis. Regular evaluation helps an employee realize that his or her contributions to the club are important and that the supervisor is interested in the sensitivities and challenges of the employee’s particular work area.

Clubs normally measure operating results against budgets. The scenario is familiar. Each month or period after the financial statements are developed, department heads meet with the GM/COO, who facilitates the process of reporting departmental results. An explanation is provided for positive or negative variances compared to budget and for whether such variances are valid variances or simply the results of timing issues.

These monthly variance reports lead to more formal quarterly meetings, which may include the board of governors. The “quarterlies” usually include plans for what measures have been or will be taken on negative variances to help ensure that budget is met. Similarly, positive variances, which are normally cause for celebration, should be scrutinized as closely as negative variances, since they too were not anticipated in the budget process.

Quarterly figures generate yearly figures, which ultimately signal a successful or unsuccessful year. In such scenarios, while clubs emphasize excellent service, they measure only financial results.

During a quarterly variance meeting, the director of golf course maintenance might offer this sort of subjective analysis:

_During August, we lost several maintenance work days due to thunderstorms – we had to send the crew home early a lot. We also lost some effectiveness in chemical applications during the month for the same reason. We may need to do some re-application. We had to load up on overtime to get the grass scalping in preparation for over-seeding done because of the rain. All-in-all it was a hot month and there was a lot of member play. Things look pretty wilted and beaten up due to the heat. I think that our numbers, while a bit out of whack for the month, are more related to timing than to actual variances, and we should be okay and back in line when we look at the quarter as a whole._
Again, an objective variance analysis is connected to measurements:

During August, we lost 400 employee work hours due to thunderstorms – we had to send the crew home early 11 times – so we lost 20 percent of our available work hours for the month, so much of our ability to keep up with planned work was lost. We also lost what we estimate to be approximately 50 percent of the effectiveness in the chemical applications during the month for the same reason. We may need to do some re-application, which will cost an additional $4,000 over budget. The rain had three effects on the golf course: 1) We were unable to work when it was raining, 2) The wetness cut back on our ability to get out on the course, and 3) The rain combined with the heat made the Bermuda grass grow at about twice its normal rate. As a result of these conditions, we had to add $6,000 (a negative variance impact) to payroll budget in overtime to get the grass scalped in preparation for seeding. All-in-all, it was a hot month (the average temperature was 93 degrees versus the normal 87 degrees) and there was a lot of member play when the course was open due to pent up demand created by the rain days when we were closed, so it was difficult to work maintenance in around the member play (the pro shop reported that daily play on the days that we were open was up 38 percent). Things look pretty wilted and beaten up due to the heat, which is normal for this time of year. Our numbers, when adjusted for overtime and re-spraying, were $89,000 for the month versus budget of $78,000. We will increase the time between our repeat frequency on some items temporarily and get back on budget by October. Overall, we hit a few speed bumps but are doing fine.

Financial results are one of the key elements in measuring success of a club’s performance. However, the financial success of the club is not the only element worth measuring.

A second key element which should be measured at the club is accomplishment of strategic initiatives. Financial results are directly determined as a result of counts – objective measures. Similarly, strategic initiatives can and should be counted and timed.

“Counts” would indicate how many times a task was accomplished. “Times” would represent how long it took to accomplish the task or project and would help determine whether it was done according to the established time line.

An example of a subjective evaluation of a strategic initiative is not tied to measurable results:

This year, the club’s front nine greens were successfully stripped and re-built. After many years of mutating greens, which became predominantly Poa Annua from Bent, the rebuilding of the greens project began in spring and re-opened in fall. The Poa Annua had taken over and ruined the greens. Members were really unhappy.

There were a number of normal construction problems during the project, but all-in-all, I think that we ended up pretty much opening on time and ending on budget.

On the other hand, an example of objective measurement of a strategic initiative includes direct measurements:

This year, the club’s front nine greens were successfully stripped and re-built. After 15 years of mutating greens, which ultimately reached 75 percent Poa Annua mixed with the original Penncross Bentgrass, the rebuilding of the greens project began March 1 and ended with the re-opening, on budget and on schedule, September 1.

Mutation of the greens to predominantly Poa Annua had progressively made the putting surface bumpy, less true and less predictable. During early spring, the seed heads grew tight and low, which were unsightly and exacerbated the bumpy conditions. During the hotter weather of summer, it was not unusual to observe bare spots in the greens as large as 18 feet in diameter – as Poa Annua often withers and dies during extreme heat. These examples had caused increasing levels of dissatisfaction among golfers at all levels.

The club had strategically planned for the re-building beginning five years ago, so we were able to properly anticipate, bid, stage and re-schedule events for the six-month project. The process included stripping contaminated sod down to the soil mix, roto-tilling in fresh soil amendments, re-establishing the original contours and surface design and seeding with a newer variety of Bentgrass. This first phase took the allotted 30 days. After the destruction and prep stages, the greens were covered with clear plastic and grown-in for 60 days (April and May). On June 1, the plastic was removed, and the young grass was cultivated for another 90 days (June, July and August).
A “soft” opening was held on September 1, with normal play resuming September 15. A survey of the members in November (when the course was open) rated the front nine greens a two (on a 10-point scale with 10 being “best”). A follow-up survey this past November (the new nine had been open for 90 days) rated the front nine greens a 10. Budget: $770,000. Actual: $728,000. Projected time: March 1-August 31. Actual time: March 4-August 31.

1.4.11.4 Rewarding

Rewarding usually means creating incentive bonus programs, which can be quite effective. However, in some clubs, incentive bonus programs operate effectively primarily at management levels.

At hourly levels, a combination of smaller incentive bonuses combined with preferred scheduling and other non-monetary bonuses work even more effectively than monetary rewards. Whatever the reward chosen, positive strategic accomplishment and operating results should be rewarded on the basis of objective measures.

Some clubs, as well as other organizations, do not believe in giving bonuses. Clubs that ascribe to this philosophy typically justify their belief: We pay our employees a decent wage, so why should we pay them extra for something that they are already paid to do?

Ideally, every club would have every employee on an incentive plan that rewards excellence – as measured objectively.

Clearly, subjective measures alone do not allow preciseness in creating goals, reporting progress, evaluating performance or rewarding employees. Subjectivity often signals one or more of several possible dilemmas:

- The manager or board member is not prepared to report.
- The manager or board member is not familiar with the club’s goals and objectives (or, which is worse, precise goals and objectives do not exist at the club).
- The manager or board member is unsure about an employee’s performance and, thus, describes feelings, impressions and generalities during performance review.
- The manager or board member rewards or punishes based on whether the employee is likable, rather than on objectively measured accomplishments.

Much of this tendency, especially by the board of governors, is due to the short-term governance model mentioned previously and adopted by most private clubs.

Board members are typically elected by the membership to three-year terms. Thus, each year, one-third of the board members cycle off of the board, one-third of the board members have one year left to serve, one-third of the board members have two years left and one-third of the board members (the incoming members) are elected to a three-year term. Similarly, the president is most likely elected to a one-year term.

While this model may generally work well for private clubs, especially since service is voluntary, the brevity of appointments typically allows governing boards to focus only on major issues and crises. Ideally, strategy and implementation of objective measures tied to incentive plans can help focus on “minor” issues as well – encouraging and rewarding excellence.
2 Personal Strategic Planning

A personal strategic plan provides guidelines to help ensure effectiveness and success in your personal and professional life.

Personal strategic planning relates to organizational strategic planning in its focus: on-the-job behaviors. On-the-job behaviors become part of your strategic plan when they are incorporated into your way of life as a long-term, pre-determined “bundle” that affects everything that you do, think or say at work.

2.1 Personal Strategic Analysis

NOTE: Please refer to the Personal Strategic Analysis Form (3.7) and Personal Strategic Analysis Worksheet (3.8) to support this section.

Conducting a personal strategic analysis helps you get in touch with who you are as a person. Determining who you are is important in determining how you will be as a manager because personal values influence how you manage on the job.

2.1.1 Rank-Ordered Descriptors

Creating a list of statements about yourself is an effective way to gain insight about who you are and what you stand for.

As you begin to create a list of descriptors, do not worry about ranking the descriptions. It is more effective for the creative process to simply write statements; you can assign importance later. You should aim for creating a list of at least five descriptors during this exercise.

This is, at first, often an uncomfortable experience for managers. Part of the reason for this uneasiness is that managers, and especially club managers, are used to the on-the-job doing rather than the personal thinking, envisioning and reflecting.

An example of a rank-ordered descriptor:

_It is important for me to maintain a balance between work and home in my life._

2.1.2 Primary Strengths

In the next step of the personal strategic analysis, prepare a list of your primary strengths – what you are good at doing.

This should be a first-order list of your major qualities – those elements that drive your success as a person and as a manager. You should aim for creating a list of at least five descriptors during this exercise.

An example of a primary strength:

_I am adept at quickly understanding the gist of any operations situation._

2.1.3 Individuals and Experiences

Whether you realize it or not, you have been molded and shaped, to a large extent, by key people and events in your life. In understanding who you are, it is important that you identify and reflect on people and events that influenced you in a major way.

Positive examples are certainly important to list and will likely be the easiest to recall. However, negative examples molded and shaped you as well, so list those negative examples too. You should aim for creating a list of at least two individuals and two experiences during this exercise.
An example of positive individual:

Coach John W. “Wimpy” Sutton was an important and influential person in my life. When I was a young, aimless ninth grader, he came to me and asked me to be on the basketball team. He taught me the importance of self-sacrifice for the good of the team. As a person, Coach Sutton served as a positive role model.

An example of a positive experience:

Serving in the U.S. Marine Corps was an important and influential event in my life. At 19 years old, I lacked a strong sense of honor, discipline and purpose. The Marine Corps taught me the importance of those characteristics and qualities. Beyond those, the USMC also taught me the importance of creating and achieving measurable goals and objectives.

An example of a negative individual:

As a young manager, I reported to the vice president of marketing, who was a micro-manager, an attention hog, a drug abuser and a liar. Two years of reporting to this vice president were miserable. However, that time taught me several positive lessons: You cannot keep secrets from those who report to you in the organization; you must always assume that what you are doing is going to be printed on the front page of the company newsletter. Also, that experience taught me to respect others and trust them to do their work without unnecessary meddling. I also learned to celebrate others’ accomplishments and give them credit for doing a great job, instead of trying to steal the credit for myself, as that vice president would so often do.

An example of a negative experience:

I worked on a farm for one summer when I was a teenager. The farmer told me that I would have a great learning experience and get a great education because I would be working all summer with a Ph.D. Later, I realized that his “PHD” was a post-hole digger. That summer was the most physically exhausting three months of my life—setting fence posts, stretching barbed wire, planting trees and feeding ducks. However, it was a strategic turning point for me because it reinforced the importance of getting a good education. That summer, I set a number of goals to help ensure a planned future.

2.1.4 Personal and Professional Goals and Objectives

Managers report that setting goals and objectives is an excellent way to develop a roadmap for where they are going and where their energies should be focused. In developing goals and objectives, however, you should remember that personal goals should be written in pencil—that is, they should be flexible enough to be changed as circumstances change.

Consider the goal of a tourist to drive from Miami to Boston. His or her objectives are the cities in which he or she stops each day along the journey—the first day calls for a stop in Savannah, GA; the second in Washington, D.C.

As a tourist, if you mark destinations on your map in pen, it becomes very difficult for you to change your mind. However, if you draw the route in pencil, you may easily change your mind and drive the first day to Myrtle Beach, SC.

Writing goals in pencil instead of pen is symbolic, of course. The point is that your goals and objectives are guidelines. It is important to know where you are going, but it is also important for you to be able to change your mind. The idea is to create your future instead of allowing circumstances to dictate your path.

For example, assume a certain food and beverage director hates his job at the club. He had grown up in the surrounding neighborhood, had started working part-time at the club as a teenager and, after high school, had earned a position in the dining room. From there, he moved to the bar, then supervised the dining room and was recently promoted to food and beverage director. Asked why he hated his job, he answered that he never wanted to work in food and beverage, but that it was the hand that he was dealt.
That food and beverage director was passive in directing his future. He took opportunities, but only because they were easy and accessible. On the other hand, consider a college senior who creates her future. She had majored in hotel and restaurant management at a university in the West and accepted an internship at a prestigious club in Atlanta.

Apprehensive about leaving her home and friends, she was still excited to have the opportunity to meet new people and learn new ways of doing things in the South. After the internship, she planned to get at least two years of intensive food and beverage experience at a great club in the East. Then she wanted to get back to the West within three years as an assistant manager at a full-service country club in southern California.

She felt that if she was able to stay on track, she would have a chance to become a GM/COO at a small club, preferably in California, Arizona or Nevada, within 10 years.

She had a clear plan, long-range goals and interim objectives. As long as she stays flexible – writing with a pencil instead of a pen – to taking advantage of unexpected opportunities, she has certainly created a great future.

2.1.4.1 Five-Year Personal Goals

Think for a moment about personal goals that you would like to achieve over the next five years. What is important to you? What do you see yourself doing? Where do you see yourself living? What will life be like for you five years from now?

Take a shot at writing down the two or three key things that you likely have (and have had) in the back of your mind that you would like to accomplish personally. You should aim for creating a list of at least two personal five-year goals, accompanied by objectives.

After writing down two or three key personal goals that you would like to accomplish, ask yourself how you would go about achieving them. Creating goals is extremely important, but writing a few key statements about objectives – interim goals – helps move you toward implementation. Also, be sure to write down – using objective counts and times – how you will measure your progress toward achievement of these goals.

As with club-specific goals, personal goals answer several basic questions. Here is an example of a personal five-year goal:

What?
I will permanently lose my excess body fat. My ultimate goal over five years is to lose 200 pounds.

When?
I will successfully lose all 200 pounds over a five-year period beginning on June 1, 2005, and ending May 31, 2010. By the end of each year, I will have lost 40 pounds. By the end of each month, I will have lost an average of 3.5 pounds.

Where?
Regular outside workouts on the trail by the river, the state park and the 24-hour fitness gym.

Why?
Not only am I tired of being fat, but decreasing my unhealthful weight will also increase my life expectancy, quality of life and other health-related details (blood pressure, heart rate and cholesterol). This is important to me, my wife and my children.

How?
I will begin by getting a physical exam from my doctor. Pending her comments, I will solicit a personal trainer from 24-hour fitness gym, as well as seek assistance and guidance from a local nutritionist referred by my doctor. I will create exercise plans and workouts that will change over time. The workouts will be balanced between cardio and weightlifting.
Who cares?

I care, my wife cares, my children care and even the people at the club care. They want to see me become a better, healthier and happier person who lives the life he has potential to live.

2.1.4.2 Five-Year Professional Goals

Think for a moment about professional goals that you would like to achieve over the next five years. What is important to you? What do you see yourself doing? Where do you see yourself living? What will life be like for you five years from now?

Write down the two or three key things that you would like to accomplish professionally. You should aim for creating a list of at least two professional five-year goals.

After your key professional goals, ask yourself how you would go about achieving them.

Here is an example of a professional five-year goal – also answering the basic questions of analysis – for a club manager:

What?

I will concentrate on taking more of the educational programs offered by CMAA. My ultimate goal is to achieve the Certified Club Manager (CCM) designation.

When?

I will successfully achieve my CCM designation over a five-year period beginning on June 1, 2005, and ending May 31, 2010.

Where?

I will attend programs locally, regionally and nationally as necessary to meet my goal.

Why?

I want to obtain my CCM as a professional goal. The CCM designation is the most recognized level of expertise in the club management field.

How?

By the end of each year, I will have attended six chapter meetings and education sessions, participated in one chapter workshop and attended the CMAA World Conference. Every other year, I will attend one of the required BMI programs. By the end of year four, I will have assessed any education-point deficit areas and will concentrate on tying up loose ends. By November of year five, I will have applied to take the certification review course in Atlanta and will be registered to take the certification exam afterward. Additionally, I will buy the certification resource texts, will develop a small study group with three other managers in my chapter and will meet with them locally once each month during year five to review the readings and questions.

Who cares?

I care, my family cares, my Board of Governors cares and the club members care. It is very important for me professionally and personally that I obtain my CCM designation.

After writing a goal, review it to make certain that it is challenging. Any goal should challenge you and your abilities. Ask yourself: Does this goal really stretch my abilities? If it seems too easy, consider shortening the time frame or re-writing the goal to make it more challenging. Is the goal attainable? While goals should stretch your abilities, they must be attainable. Inasmuch as a goal is a glimpse into the future, that future should be attainable. Otherwise, you may see the goal as being “impossible” and won’t commit your energies toward achieving the goal.

Whether writing goals for yourself or helping others create goals, remember to avoid statements that suggest failure. Negotiate with yourself and others to create agreement on personal and professional goals.
2.1.4.3 Ten-Year Personal and Professional Goals
After writing five-year personal and professional goals, you should also create 10-year goals for yourself and those whom you supervise.

Managers often refer to 10-year goals as “guiding principles.” While the tenure of managers is stereotypically short-term – especially as younger managers are promoted upward within a club or to another club – this aspect should not affect your perspective on 10-year, longer-term goals.

Ten-year goals can be a way to express your determination – your focus on outcomes, plans and dreams – at your club and in the private club industry as a whole. Your managerial skills, especially if you have achieved CCM or MCM status, are viable skills – and are highly “portable” among clubs.

While the process for creating 10-year goals is essentially the same as for five-year goals, the longer time-frame is often discouraging to managers for a number of reasons. Some managers are not used to thinking so far ahead. Others see the long time-frame as not requiring immediate attention. Still others believe that the long time period is unpredictable and that planning so far in advance is futile.

None of those are valid reasons for not planning your next 10 years in advance. In fact, there are even more reasons why setting 10-year goals is effective.

Thinking strategically and from a long-term perspective ensures that you are creating, to the best of your ability, your future. As mentioned previously, creating your future is much more powerful than allowing circumstances to create you.

Also, the long time-frame allows you to work toward outcomes over the “long haul.” You have many years to work with an outcome in mind. Thus, when an option or opportunity presents itself, you will be better able to determine whether it will help you achieve your goals.

Most importantly, the future is predictable – to a large extent. This is especially true if you are able to align your thoughts and energies toward accomplishing specific goals.

As with your five-year goals, 10-year goals, whether yours or those of others, should stretch abilities while remaining attainable. The longer the time-frame of the goal, the more important it becomes to review the goal to make certain that it is challenging. It is not at all unusual to find that you can accomplish your 10-year goals in five years, as long as you focus your thoughts and energies toward goal-accomplishment.

Keep negotiating with yourself or others to create “buy-in” on goal creation – and then get busy working on achieving your future.

2.1.5 Planning for Your Next Logical Steps
An important element in creating your future is forecasting your next logical career steps so that you can begin moving your efforts in that direction. Again, to the extent that you can influence outcomes, you want to help create your future instead of allowing circumstances to dictate it for you.

Think for a moment about where you are now – your position at the club. Now, envision your next logical position at the club. Think of it honestly: Are you moving into an area or position that would be exciting? Or not at all interesting? When is the move likely to happen? Will you be making a lateral move to get experience in another area? Or are you are topping out?
2.1.5.1 Preferred Area and Position
When envisioning your next logical position at the club, you should evaluate whether the area or position toward which you are headed interests you. Is it where you want to be moving within the club?

For example, if you have been the evening dining room service manager in the mixed grill and sense that you will be moving into a maitre d’ position – heading-up the service side of the club’s food-service operation – you should take a close look at the position itself. Do you want – or need – to stay in the food and beverage department?

You should also ask yourself whether this path will help you reach your goals and objectives. This is all part of the planning process. You cannot ask yourself these questions unless you have determined your personal and professional goals and objectives.

After analyzing whether their next likely move is to a preferred area and position, proactive managers have two options. You could decide that you would accept the new maitre d’ position and stay in the food and beverage department, in which case you should ensure that your strategic behaviors – everything that you think, do and say – reinforce your consideration as the logical choice for the position when it becomes available.

Or, you could instead decide that the area and or position are not for you. If you identify your logical track as leading you deeper into an area or toward a position that is not of interest to you – for whatever reason – understanding this early will give you the ability to influence the decision. The unsatisfied food and beverage manager we met earlier did not have such foresight.

One successful GM/COO related his experience with evaluating his next logical steps. Having come up through the food and beverage department of a well-respected northeastern club, he decided that he did not want to move from his then-position as morning service manager in the grill to the position of beverage manager, a position which he had identified as his next logical career move.

In his re-evaluation, he realized that his lifestyle, goals and objectives – both personal and professional – did not include spending long, late-night hours working in and supervising the club’s beverage operation. Thus, during various performance reviews, he mentioned to his then-supervisor, the clubhouse manager, that he would prefer a role in the membership department.

When the membership director left the club unexpectedly, the manager, who happened to also oversee the membership department, made the now-vacant position available for the service manager. The service manager had helped created his own future through planning and discussion and by directing his actions and energies toward his objectives – he got that job as membership director and is now a successful GM/COO.

Spend time forecasting where you are headed at your own club. If you like your potential department and the position to which your path seems to lead, put your effort into helping ensure that you reach that position. On the other hand, if you do not like where you are headed, make your interests and preferences known over time – and at the appropriate time.

Think and communicate strategically.

2.1.5.2 Identifying the Timeframe
When envisioning your next move at the club, you should estimate when the opportunity may arise – when the position will be available.

Identifying a timeframe will allow you to prepare yourself. What do you need to be doing? What do you need to be learning? With whom do you need to be cultivating a relationship?

Knowing approximately when the opportunity may come about, you can orient your efforts toward making the possibility become reality. In the club environment, it is often difficult to know when areas and positions will open. But it is never too soon to focus your efforts toward those areas and positions. In doing so, you help position yourself as a logical candidate for those positions as they become available.
2.1.5.3 Lateral or Promotion
Consider the upcoming opportunity. While promotions are ideal, at times lateral moves are necessary. This is especially true for managers who consider themselves “passing through” a particular department to gain working knowledge, not necessarily depth of knowledge.

For example, one southwestern GM/COO had long-considered food and beverage her “home” department and her comfort zone. However, she had set a goal many years before: She would become the GM/COO of a country club within 10 years.

Thus, with no experience in golf course and grounds maintenance – and knowing she had to “get her card punched” in that area by understanding some of the sensitivities of course maintenance – she became a working supervisor for six months. Though she had no intention of becoming a golf course superintendent, she wanted to prepare for her future.

She now looks back at her time in golf course maintenance – her lateral move as a young manager – as a strategic turning point that helped her gain a competitive advantage. Eventually, she made it to that GM/COO position at a country club – all by age 34.

So carefully consider your opportunities, especially if you are a young manager. Will a lateral move help your gain working knowledge of a key department outside of your “home” department? Most likely, it will.

2.1.5.4 Topping-Out
When you are considering your next logical position, be honest with yourself. Have you topped-out? If you have reached the apex of your career, position-wise, you still have a few options. Topping-out or “plateauing” is usually related to your position at a particular club and perhaps not to your ability.

If you have determined that you have topped-out at your present club, you should decide among these options: do nothing, “re-tool” or move on.

If you decide to do nothing, ensure that you satisfied with your decision. Doing nothing is not a bad decision, as long as it is a strategic decision. A clubhouse manager may realize that he or she has topped out – at least in the foreseeable future – at a large country club. However, his is a very prestigious club; the pay is great, challenges are ever-present and the geographic location is ideal. For him, plateauing is a reasonable, strategic decision.

"Re-tooling” is another option, exemplified by the manager who wanted experience in golf course maintenance in order to boost her viability as a general manager candidate. She took positive steps to gain experience where she was lacking – she re-tooled and achieved her goal.

Re-tooling may also be a good strategy for an experienced manager who is very deep in a department. However, flexibility is extremely important to success in this process. Managers who are stubborn or otherwise set in their ways are often not successful in moving laterally into an area of uncertainty. Managers who consider re-tooling should take an honest look at what is in store for them before proceeding.

Simply moving on is another strategic option. In club management, this option is perhaps the most common method of advancing. And it is a viable option if an honest look at the present situation suggests that little change will occur in the future. Managers who decide to move on out of a position or out of a club should, if possible, discuss this option with their supervisors. Often, especially in larger and more-established clubs, GM/COOs groom assistant managers for GM/COO positions at other clubs.

If you have topped-out, whatever career option you choose, make sure that your personal strategic plan is the foundation for your decision. After following through and moving into your next logical position, take another look into the future toward your next logical step and then to the next step after that one.